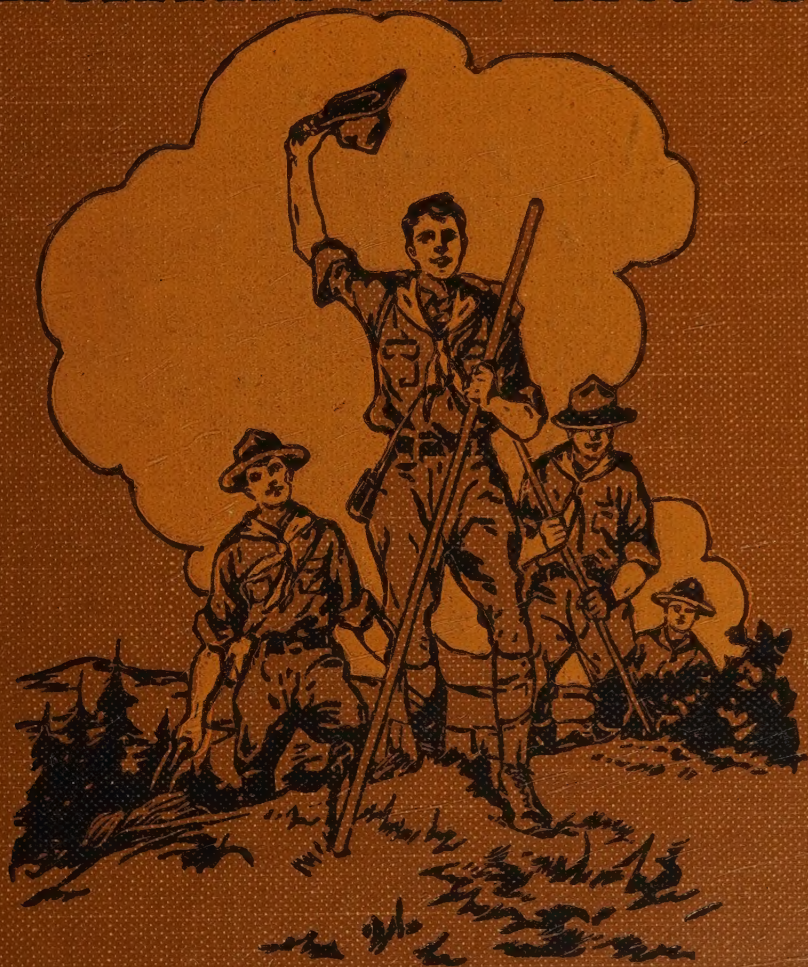


The BOY SCOUTS *of the* LIGHTHOUSE TROOP



F. MOULTON McLANE





With love & Xmas. joy
Junk Helen.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Chula Vista Rd.

Tucson, Arizona

85718



“He’s a long time gettin’ ready,” sneered Foley.
(Page 78) *Frontispiece*

THE BOY SCOUTS
OF THE
LIGHTHOUSE TROOP
OR
THE SURPRISING ADVENTURES
OF A NEW YORK SCHOOL BOY

BY
F. MOULTON McLANE
Author of the Dan of the Mountain Stories, etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES L. WRENN

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE TROOP
—McLANE

THE BOY SCOUT TRAIL BLAZERS—CHELEY

THE BOY SCOUT TREASURE HUNTERS—LEB-
RIGO

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The Boy Scouts of the Lighthouse Troop

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE TROOP

CHAPTER I

TOUGH JOE DARBY

“**J**OE, Dr. Cunningham wants to see you in the office,” said Miss Scott, as Joe Darby tornadoed into the room, slammed his books onto his desk with a bang, greeted the boy in front of him by ruffling his hair, and then began to fidget in his seat as usual.

Joe stopped fidgeting at that. Hastily, he began to recall all the things that he had done that he shouldn't have, and all the things he hadn't done that he should have, and wondered what particular one had demanded a visit to the principal's office. He grinned at the boys who turned around to look at him. Everybody in the room knew what that summons meant.

“Now?” he growled, in his gruff voice.

“As soon as you came, Dr. Cunningham said,” Miss Scott sighed. She knew that half the impudence and insolence that his other teachers complained of was the mere roughness and gruffness

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of an "unlicked cub"; her longing to help him softened her tired eyes as his chanced to meet them. So that Joe, once outside the door, said to himself,

"Jiminy! Now I *know* they're goin' to kick me out, by the way Miss Scott looked at me!"

He calculated once more—rather proudly—his term's record. Every time you misbehaved you got a "pink card" to take to the office; three pink cards meant a note home; and three notes home meant you were suspended—or, "kicked out" as Joe called it. Joe's record so far this term stood—two notes home, and two pink cards toward another one.

The more he thought about it, the more certain he was. "*She* knows," he said, hotly. "I'll bet she's only too glad to get rid of me!" The knowledge that there was ample reason for every one of his teachers to rejoice at his absence did not help him feel more comfortable. "Well, if they feel that way about it, let 'em! She's only gettin' even with me for that mouse!"

Last week a dead mouse he spied on the top of an ash-barrel, had appealed to his sense of mischief so strongly that he put it in his pocket and later slipped it under the lid of Miss Scott's desk. He had watched her eagerly as she came in. She lifted the lid—then closed it down quickly, as he expected, with the pretty pink all gone from her cheeks. Joe felt a bit sorry he had done it. A

moment later he didn't feel so sorry, for she rose to go out, and in the doorway called, "Joe, come here, please."

"They once think you're bad, and how they'll pick at you," he thought. "Gee! Even if a feller should want to try—" (which hadn't entered his head till that very moment) "he ain't got no chance. *She* can't know I put it there, but she spots *me*, first of all!"

Once outside, she didn't accuse him; instead, she leaned against the wall. Joe hoped fervently that she wouldn't faint. Maybe she had called him because he was so big and strong. But she said, in a shaky voice,

"Joe, I want you to do something for me. Will you?"

"Yes," he had answered, gruffly, hoping she wasn't going to ask him to carry her home.

"A poor little mouse got into my desk last night and suffocated, I suppose. He's lying just under the lid. I know I can trust you—will you, without letting the rest know—go and take it out? I can't bear the sight of a mouse. It makes me sick to look at one." He knew she wasn't pretending; she surely looked sick. "There's a pad of foolscap paper there. Wrap him up in a sheet of it, and—take it downstairs, will you, please? Don't put it in the waste basket—I should think of it there all day."

"Yes'm," he answered; and went and did it.

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He was sorry he had made her sick, and glad of the chance to make up for it, even if she didn't know.

But now, he thought angrily, he wasn't so sure about her not guessing. "She's gettin' even with me for that mouse," he repeated to himself. "She knew I did it, and didn't let on. She's fixed it for me, all right! She's just as mean as the rest!"

Now he was actually facing the possibility of being suspended, it didn't seem so much fun as he had thought it would. Ever since receiving his last pink card, he had had a delicious sense of peril, of skimming the danger-line, quite as the heroes of the paper-covered thrillers that he loved, lived every hour in overhanging danger. He had thoroughly enjoyed the slight gasps from the class as he kept on misbehaving, neglecting his lessons, being saucy to teachers—even after his last pink card. But as he went out this time, and grinned back at the faces that grinned meaningly at him—hadn't there been a maliciousness, an exultance in their grins—a laughing *at* him instead of *with* him? He forgot that he had always tried to make the others laugh. "Yes, they've had the fun," came the sudden thought, "and *I'm* payin' for it. I've been circus clown for them, and now *this* is just another stunt for them to look at. Jiminy! They don't care what it means—t' *me!*"

Nor did they. They were watching "Big Joe

Darby get his," curious to see how he'd take it, and wondering what it would mean to him at home.

Joe was thinking of home, too. Mr. Darby was not a patient man. He worked hard all day, one of a gang digging cellars for a big construction company; and he had plenty of worries. Joe was the third of his eight children. Dick, the oldest, was a good-for-nothing, with "sporty" inclinations and a corresponding distaste for work. His chief occupation was "looking for a job"; but, whenever he found one, he speedily succeeded in getting himself discharged. The next brother, Jack, had run away from home three years ago—after a scene with his father—and had never been heard from. A younger sister was a cripple, whose ill-health used up every extra penny. Mr. Darby owed the doctor for her last sickness; he owed the installment house for their parlor furniture; and he was carrying a heavy life insurance on himself and all the children.

Joe remembered well what his father had said when the last pink card went home to be signed. Instead of delivering Joe a long lecture on behavior, Mr. Darby had merely looked at Joe—a look Joe couldn't forget!—and said, angrily,

"You git kicked out o' school" (Joe began to feel afraid, he was so vehement) "an' I git you a job. Yes; I git you a job shovelin' on a garbage scow. I got a friend, boss there, that'll take you. But first, mind you—I'll give you a good one!"

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And he jerked his head toward the closet where the trunk and the trunk strap were stored.

Joe had had, in his lifetime, just two of his father's "good ones" and he knew just what that promise signified. He didn't hanker after a third. Neither did he like the idea of standing all day long knee-deep in garbage, shoveling incessantly, as the carts dumped their odorous burdens down into the scow. He had often watched the men doing it—always at a safe olfactory distance. What if "the fellers" came and watched him as he had watched with them only the other day.

By this time he had reached the principal's office. Joe slouched in with a little swagger, and took his accustomed place on the familiar long bench. They *always* kept you waiting, Joe remembered, just to get you uneasy. But he was an old hand at it now, he bragged to himself. They couldn't get *him* uneasy.

He looked around to see if there were other fellow-sufferers he could condole with, by sympathetic nudges, kicks, and scuffles. No, there was no one there but a strange boy with an "admit slip," who kept his eyes down. Joe felt irritated. He wasn't accustomed not to be looked at. Of course, a new boy wouldn't know he was sitting near the toughest boy in the school, but that didn't make Joe dislike him any less. Joe didn't like fellows that set themselves up and wouldn't look at you, just because they had better clothes.

Yet this chap didn't look exactly stuck-up in the face. He had a peculiar expression—a patient, *waiting*, listening look that puzzled Joe. That look made Joe think of Sis; yet this chap didn't look sick. His face and hands were brown as if he spent some time out in the open. He held himself straight as an arrow; so much so that Joe unconsciously straightened his own big, slouching shoulders. By and by Joe noticed that his eyes didn't follow the little things that happened in the office—Miss Ford flounced in, wearing a bright red waist—the two clerks giggled together in the corner. Now he had it! this new chap was *blind*!

“What's *he* comin' to school for?” thought Joe. “What does he think he can learn? How can he read, or study, or write exercises? Jiminy! he doesn't know how hard it is.” Joe found himself feeling sorry for him.

Joe couldn't keep from studying him. He had always thought of blind people as groping about helplessly with outstretched hands, as children grope when they play blindman's-buff. He had also pictured them with clothing put on awry, and hair uncombed, because how could they see themselves in the mirror? They also had grease spots over their clothing where they spilled food as they ate. Joe looked in vain for any. This boy was painfully neat, and tidy, even to trimness. Then, chancing to glance down at his own coat he found it ornamented with a splash of this morn-

ing's soup and a dash of yesterday's potato and gravy. And *he*, he thought to himself, wasn't blind!

But just then Joe's eyes happened to rove into the inner office. What he saw brought him back to his own affairs, and his heart sank as he looked. Dr. Cunningham was just reading a typewritten letter that the clerk had taken in; now he was signing it—now he was putting it into its envelope.

Although Joe, as yet didn't know what particular misdeed had "tripped him up," he did know there had been plenty of them that might have caused a pink card to be filed in the office. Once more he counted—two notes home; since then, two pink cards. Two plus one was three. A third note home—suspension—

In his desperation, Joe made, then and there, a wild resolution. He'd *never* take that suspension letter home! He—*couldn't*. He'd run away first; go West, or sail as stowaway in some of the vessels he had often watched at their piers. "I'm big and strong," he thought, flexing his big biceps muscle. "They'd like me on a vessel. Course, they'd thrash me, first—but—it wouldn't be like—my father's—"

He began to plan how he could make his escape. If Dr. Cunningham gave him the note to carry home at the close of school, it would be easy. He would simply tear it up, go home, pack up a bundle, get his secretly hoarded dollar out of the

mattress, say good-by to his Sis, without her knowing it, and steal away that night, with an eight hours' start. But if the principal *mailed* it—it would reach home by noon, while he was still in school! His father was working near home this week, and went home at noon. If it got there then—!

Joe whistled. His father might be so angry that he'd start for the school to get him—with the pupils all in the yard at recess. Joe's cheeks grew red. Every bit of pride in him cried out that there *mustn't* be a scene like that! School tradition still told of a boy whose father pulled out a strap right in the principal's office, and used it then and there.

If that didn't happen, then when Joe got home that afternoon, his mother would lock him in one of the inner rooms of the flat till his father arrived—and Dick was home "out of work" as usual and would be only too glad to *put* Joe in his room if he didn't go himself. Dick was bigger than he, and a full-fledged bully. Joe knew he'd do some preliminary punishing for his own amusement when he got him in there alone.

There was no way out of that inner room. The transom into the flat hall was too small to climb through. The single window opened into a blind airshaft, which had no outlet into the cellar at its base, and was too wide for him to climb across into the next flat. Why, if the letter was mailed he couldn't go home at all!

Jiminy! But he was up against it. If he didn't go home at all, he couldn't take anything with him but the things he stood in. He had just five cents in his pocket. He had even accidentally left his dandy jack-knife on the table at home that morning. But, worst of all, he would have at most, only a bare three hours' start, with his father working within ten minutes' walk of home! Joe watched Dr. Cunningham with a dull ache of despair. And, as he watched, Joe saw him stick a stamp on the envelope.

CHAPTER II

WANTED—WINGS

AT last Dr. Cunningham finished his conference with his secretary. Then he came to the doorway, smiling. Joe hated him for that smile. Grown-ups always smiled when they'd *got* you. And Dr. Cunningham had certainly got him.

"You there, Joe?" he asked, with great cheerfulness. "Roy, too?" The blind lad turned his head alertly. "Joe, you come in first. And shut the door." The last four words confirmed Joe's fears; and he watched Dr. Cunningham as he played with the envelope that he still held in his hand.

"Well, Joe?" he said, pleasantly, seating himself. "I suppose you want to know why I sent for you?"

Joe looked up anxiously. *How* anxiously, he could not realize: but it made the principal hasten to speak quickly:

"Do you want to earn some money?" he asked.

Behind his back Joe's right hand gripped his left wrist to keep from shouting with the relief of it.

"Yes, sir," he answered, fervently.

"We were looking for some one in 1-B grade who would be trustworthy for what we needed. Miss Scott spoke of you." He did not add that Miss Scott had not only first mentioned Joe, but afterward had pleaded for him, rather against Dr. Cunningham's opinion: urging what she knew of the lad, and pleading her conviction that this was the one chance that might help Joe Darby "find himself."

"Yes, sir?" said Joe, eager now to hear the rest. *Miss Scott*—had spoken of *him*! After all he had done! He couldn't make it seem real.

"We have a blind boy entering to-day. You may have noticed him as you sat waiting. He has to have, of course, a guide to take him around. His guide will be paid a dollar a week for his services. You would have to take him from class to class, and help him to study in study-hours. Think it over for a minute while I see what Miss Green wants."

Dr. Cunningham strode into the outer office, leaving Joe with brain a-whirl. At first he wondered, with a bit of resentment, why they had picked out *him*—tough Joe Darby—to be, as he expressed it, "a blind sucker's nursery-maid." He thought how the other fellers would make fun of him in his new rôle of guardian-angel. "I'd have to turn goody-good, too," he thought. Then he thought of the money they needed so sorely at

home, and of the pride and pleasure there would be in taking a whole dollar home every week. The memory of the unconcealed joy with which the fellers had watched him depart, as they thought, to be expelled, made him add, as a corollary to his first thought, "It's none o' their business. Won't they be surprised when I come back, and show 'em Dr. Cunningham *trusted* me!"

"Of course," said Dr. Cunningham, returning that moment, "there are one or two little difficulties. We know how much you like fun—mischievous, thoughtless, often troublesome fun. Of course there must be no fooling, and no pranks at Roy's expense."

Joe's eyes opened. Did Dr. Cunningham really think he'd do such a scurvy thing as play tricks on a blind chap? His next words showed unpromisingly that he did.

"You oughtn't to be surprised at our thinking that. You know you *have* done a great many things that were—yes, we must call them just plain mean: mean to your class-mates, mean to your teachers, and certainly mean in worrying your parents." Joe thought of his father's savage promise, and wondered scornfully how much it worried *him*! Joe didn't believe his father could tell what Joe was studying in school, or even what grade he was in.

"I wouldn't play tricks on a feller that was—that way," blurted Joe, awkwardly.

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"We-ell. That's what Miss Scott said, as I remember. But there's another difficulty."

"Yes, sir?" asked Joe anxiously. Now that there was a possibility of not earning that precious money, it loomed twice as large to him.

"The question of your rather low scholarship. With such marks as you have—one failure, the rest bare sixties—it's a question whether you can afford to give up the necessary extra time. You need it for your own work. You know we always consider sixty a sort of 'charity mark.' "

Joe opened his lips, but closed them again. How could he tell Dr. Cunningham, in answer, that he studied just as little as he possibly could, and "skin through"; that his failure in Latin was solely an error of judgment—the result of "cutting down too fine" on this study.

"I—I'll study harder at home," he found himself promising rather to his own surprise. He never dreamed that such a thing as marks could stand between himself and a chance to earn money.

"Then there's the fact that you and Roy will be allowed to speak whenever necessary, without asking permission. You mustn't abuse that privilege, or any others granted you because of him."

"Dr. Cunningham, I won't—honest!"

"Is that a promise, Joe?" Dr. Cunningham's hands went to Joe's shoulders, and his eyes looked straight down into the boy's.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, unhesitatingly.



"Roy, this is Joe Darby, who will be your guide."

Something in the principal's straight man-to-man look and question called up a feeling of self-respect new to Joe.

Dr. Cunningham considered for the whole of the next sixty seconds. Joe knew, for he watched the second-hand of the clock as he waited. That self-respect-feeling had oozed away considerably before the principal spoke again.

"Well. Suppose we try it for a month, and see how it works." His serious face vanished, and he smiled at Joe as he never had before—as if they were friends and not enemies. "Now you must meet Roy. But first—will you run out to the corner with this letter? They collect from that box in ten minutes, and I want it to go then."

Dr. Cunningham handed Joe the letter in his hand—the letter that had caused Joe so much worry. It was addressed to a man in Syracuse!

When he ran back, the principal was at Roy's side.

"Roy, this is Joe Darby, who will be your guide. Joe, this is Roy Manners."

Roy put out a hard brown hand—straight out, and not gropingly. Somehow Joe had got the idea that all blind people were soft and flabby, like the blind white grubs that live in the earth: and blind Roy's strong grip surprised him.

"You arranged everything, Dr. Cunningham?" asked Roy: and his voice was as firm as his hand.

"Yes, yes."

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"A dollar a week is satisfactory?"

"Yes. Now you two lads stay here in the office and get acquainted till the first bell rings. He'll be in your classes, Joe, so tell him about the lessons."

"Seems kind o' mean—to take money—f'r that—" were Joe's first words.

"Why? It's a business arrangement." Roy's wonder made Joe feel abashed, and there came an awkward pause.

"I hope," began Roy, shyly, "I hope you won't mind 'being wings' for me," he laughed softly.

"Bein' wings?" echoed Joe.

"That's what I once heard an old colored mammy call her guide. I try not to be a nuisance."

Joe muttered to himself, "Bein' wings! That's a new one for Joe Darby! What would the fellers say!" Aloud he said, rather gruffly, "You mustn't think of that. Just remember I'm bein' paid for your bein' a nuisance—if you ever should be one."

Roy laughed at Joe's gruff earnestness. Joe joined him.

"But I suppose we'd better talk shop. Tell me about this school."

For Roy, to Joe's surprise, was even eager to learn about the lessons, to find out where the class was in the subjects they were studying; and delighted to learn that his change of schools would

make little difference. They were a lesson ahead of Roy's other school in Latin; a lesson behind in algebra; and in the same chapters in English and biology. Such anxiety about lessons was something new to Joe's comprehension.

"I can see how you can learn declensions and such, but how can you write the sentences, and correct them?" asked Joe, as they talked over to-day's Latin.

"I'll show you." Roy got out a wooden tablet, a strip of brass like a ruler, only it had holes in it, and what Joe called a punch. "I write Braille—an arrangement of punches for letters. See: I'll write Joe Darby." He inserted a sheet of stiff Manila paper on the tablet, laid a strip of brass across, fastened it at the side, and, using the holes in the brass to guide him, punched:



"There. That's your name, in Braille."

"Is *that* me?" exclaimed Joe. "That's great. But see here—*Joe* has only three letters in it, and you've got four; and in *Darby*, you've got seven."

"Look at the first and last ones," laughed Roy.

"They're alike," discovered Joe. "Well?"

"Those two dots mean capital, and, at the end of a sentence, a period."

"That's great!" exclaimed Joe. "Write *your* name now."

Roy immediately punched:

..

“Then you see, what I’ve written I can read with my ‘ten eyes’—this way.” Roy removed the brass strip, and felt the line of raised dots with skillful fingers. “You see I’m not so bad off—I have ten eyes instead of two.”

It made Joe feel queer, partly with wonder at Roy’s ability to write and read that way, partly with pity at having to, and most of all, at Roy’s courage and cheerfulness.

“My last guide got so he could read and transcribe what I wrote, for handing in to my teachers. He didn’t need to, though. I could send them to the Lighthouse to be ‘translated.’”

“The Lighthouse?” queried Joe, struck by something new in Roy’s voice as he spoke the name.

“The New York Association for the Blind has a big building on Fifty-ninth Street. They call it the Lighthouse. There they teach us to write and read Braille, and find guides for us, and have clubs and no end of fun for everybody, boys and girls and grown-ups. Say: next time our Scouts give an exhibition you must come.”

“Scouts!” repeated Joe, amazed. “I don’t see how—” then he stopped, wishing he could bite his clumsy tongue out.

“How blind boys can be Scouts?” finished Roy, cheerfully. “Just come and see us. And we’re not excused from any of the tests, either. You’re a Scout, aren’t you?”

“No. . . .” (Without knowing it, Roy had touched a sore spot in Joe’s heart, and Joe made haste to change the subject.) “This writing, now—couldn’t I learn it?” he demanded. The fun of learning a code appealed to him. “Would you show me the alphabet sometime? Wouldn’t it be a help to you?”

“Yes: a great help: but I had no right to ask you to do it. You see, the trouble with sending things away to be transcribed is that they can’t get back till we’re all through talking about it in class—unless I keep a lesson ahead all the time. But you needn’t do it unless you want to.”

“I do—wouldn’t miss it for anything.” In his mind’s eye he saw himself watched by his classmates as he ciphered out Roy’s exercises as easily as his dime-novel heroes read their secret codes. Only this—was real!

“When I was in the elementary school,” explained Roy, “I could get all the books in Braille, and didn’t have to depend on any one. Now, in the High School, lots of the text books aren’t printed in Braille at all, so I have to depend on some one else. I don’t like that; it was fine when I could just do it all myself.”

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Then the first bell rang, for pupils to be in their rooms, and Joe took Roy's arm.

Joe enjoyed to his innermost soul the thrill of taking Roy into class, of leading him up to Miss Scott's desk. The boys that had looked at him gleefully when he went out, now looked fairly envious. Now was his turn to seem not to see them.

But in his heart he was thankful that Roy could not see the blank look of amazement on everybody's face. He felt that to Roy he was a different sort of boy from what the others thought of him. It was a curiously pleasant feeling.

Miss Scott greeted Roy cordially, took his admission slip, and asked the necessary questions. "You find a place for him near you," she said. There was no vacant seat in the room, so Joe led Roy to his own seat, and quietly got a chair for himself and sat in the aisle. One or two boys snickered at seeing Joe yield up his seat and desk; and they tried to get funny with him. But he gave them a look and they quit. Big Joe Darby wasn't to be trifled with, that they knew. Again he was glad Roy could not see the side looks of surprise and the malicious grins that *he* had to endure without showing that he saw.

Worst of all, the teachers, too, seemed puzzled, and showed it. Cranky Miss Wheeler even delivered a remark on the subject, the tenor of which seemed to be, that if he couldn't be depended on

better than he was for doing his lessons, she was sorry for Roy.

“Splash!” muttered Joe to himself. “Ice-cold—right down your neck! Rub it in, will you, when a feller’s tryin’!” But just then Roy nudged him, smiled, and whispered, “Some eloquence!” and Joe felt easier. He hoped—how he *hoped*—that Roy wouldn’t learn—just now, anyway, before the trial month was up—that his “wings” was really the “bad boy” of his class. Partly because he might not want him for guide—yes; but more because Joe—well, he couldn’t exactly put it into words, but he simply hoped Roy wouldn’t learn it, that was all.

As the newness of his new duties wore off, Joe made other discoveries. He had to pay strict attention now, to Roy, and, in Roy’s interest, to the lesson. This was something new to him: and he was amazed to find how hard it was—the simple task of making his mind obey his will. He *wanted* to pay attention; but time and again he found his thoughts wandering—watching a fly on the ceiling, or the trees blowing outside the window. He was the more ashamed because Roy seemed not to have the least difficulty. Joe was glad Roy couldn’t see him fidget and lose himself. But he wasn’t going to be beaten by a blind chap: no, sir, not he, big Joe Darby!

It was even worse when it came to lessons. Roy “beat him all hollow,” he had to confess. He was

utterly disgusted with himself (perhaps for the first time in his life) when he tried to recite, and made a blunder that every one laughed at. " 'Twon't happen again," he vowed: "I won't let 'em—" but here he realized that he couldn't help himself—that he couldn't pummel his teachers as he did the boys—so he changed it to, "I won't give 'em a chance again—to laugh at me—before Roy." He realized that it meant reviewing his school work from the very beginning of last term, in order to know what they were talking about; but he resolved to do it.

A more delightful sensation was the special privilege of speaking to Roy during classes whenever it was necessary. Now that he could talk, right in the middle of the lesson, he didn't seem to care to. And what a free feeling it gave him, to know he wasn't going to be "jerked up" the next minute. Being good had some compensations, after all.

At the close of the third period, Miss Scott beckoned to Joe. He sprang to the desk.

"You have a study-period now, haven't you?" she asked.

"Yes'm," Joe answered.

"You and Roy are to take your study-periods in the yard, whenever the weather permits. You can study aloud there, you see, without disturbing any one else."

Joe could scarcely believe his ears. He—whose

chief amusement had been to “cut” study-periods, or to fritter away his time in them: and also to “sneak” out of the yard-gate whenever he had a chance—*he* was to be allowed to go to the yard and study unwatched. And the gate was always unlocked!

CHAPTER III

LESSONS

FOR one thing, Joe resolved that he would fight himself till he conquered, if that open gate tempted him. But to his surprise, it didn't. It might just as well have been locked, barred, bolted, or even non-existent. Joe didn't even glance that way. He led Roy to the bench beneath the big tree: and, not without a little awkwardness at the first working together, the two boys began to study.

"We'll tackle the Latin first," said Roy; "I want to catch up on that extra lesson I'm behind. Wish I could do it this period."

"Oh, well, Miss Casey is reasonable. She won't call on you to-day, anyway."

Roy looked a bit puzzled; but he only said, "But I like to know what they're talking about; and I've got to do it sometime."

"Let's peg away at it, then," and Joe opened his *Essentials of Latin*. "What do you want me to do? You'll have to tell me how to help."

"Read the new grammar part first," said Roy, preparing to listen by folding his hands and leaning his head against the tree-trunk.

Joe began the long introduction and explanation preliminary to rules on the use of the relative pronoun. They plunged into difficulties right away. First, they found he read too fast; then, when he tried to read more slowly, pausing between phrases while Roy "put it into his head" as he expressed it, Joe found he didn't understand what he was reading himself, and so of course could not phrase it intelligibly.

"Oh, well, if nobody understood it yesterday, I'm all right. She'll explain it again to-day," observed Roy. The implied compliment—that Joe would have understood it if anybody had!—made Joe hot and uncomfortable. He also felt hot and uncomfortable *because* he didn't understand it—*yesterday's* lesson! He had never been disturbed about not getting lessons before!

Even then Roy wouldn't give it up, so they plugged away at it stubbornly: till suddenly both exclaimed together, "I see!" and victory was won.

Joe learned more about how to study in that one period than he had learned in his whole school life put together. When *he* had studied his Latin lessons before, he read the new grammar work hastily, not caring whether he understood or remembered, so long as he could say he had *read* it. Then he read down the column of new words in the same manner, and wrote the translation of the sentences by the slow method of looking up every other word in the vocabulary in the back of the

book. The way Roy did it was a revelation.

After light had dawned on the meaning of the troublesome explanation and rules, Joe thought Roy would go on. But no: he insisted on reading it twice again: then in giving it back to Joe in his own words. Joe was amazed at both his quickness and his perseverance. He had never realized what thoroughness meant before.

"Vocab. next?" asked Roy, as he concluded a perfect recitation.

"Golly!" sighed Joe. "I feel like a dog that's been worryin' a bone for half an hour."

"And got all the meat off from it," added Roy slyly. "Read your old list."

"*Frater, brother, mors, death, cliens—*" read Joe rapidly.

"Hold on there. Don't I get the genitive and the gender? They're sort of necessary evils, aren't they? And please go a lot slower—they have to sink in, you know—and wait a bit before you tell the English, and let me guess from the sound. It's dandy practice."

Joe suddenly realized another hole—no, a yawning cavern—in his own method of study. *He* had never bothered with such trifles as the genitive, the declension, or the gender. So he read the words as Roy commanded, feeling a bit cheap. But presently he found himself waiting anxiously after each word to see if Roy would be able to guess their meanings. In the process he

learned something more himself about how to study.

“*Libero, liberare, liberavi, liberatus,*” read Joe, then paused.

“H’m,” Roy had a habit of thinking aloud. “We’ve had *liber*, free, and *libertas*, liberty. That’s easy—to free?”

“Yep.” They learned the entire new vocabulary in that thoroughgoing fashion. Joe thought they never would stop “worrying at it.” Down the list he went with the Latin words, Roy giving meaning, gender, and genitive, or principal parts, if a verb, till he was perfect: then they turned about and did it backwards, Joe giving the English and Roy the rest.

For the third time in that short forty minutes another glimmer of an idea dawned in Joe’s brain—that Latin and English were somehow *related* to each other. Until then, he had thought of the parallelisms suggested by his teachers as mere vexatious additions to his troubles. Why did *he* care, he had thought, that two sets of folks should *happen* to hit upon words that sounded something alike, to express one meaning? And for the third time Joe realized a bit of weakness in himself that he would have to overcome. For his Latin pronunciation was none of the best, and his mistakes bothered Roy as he tried to memorize the words.

Clang—clang.

It was the gong for the close of the period.

36 BOY SCOUTS OF LIGHTHOUSE TROOP

“Who’d ‘a’ thought ‘twas forty minutes,” Joe fairly grumbled at the close of a period of enforced study. Never before had it passed so pleasantly, as out-of-doors under the trees, in solid, earnest application. Joe thought it was the out-doors, and the trees, and the freedom from being watched, to see if you *did* study, that made it so pleasant.

He had marveled at Roy’s quickness—then blushed at his own stupidity. He had learned how to study; he had found several deficiencies in himself that might make him lose his place as helper to Roy unless he made them good by himself. He had then and there resolved to make them good, as speedily as possible. Altogether, it had been an eventful forty minutes.

At the close of school—which also never came so soon, Joe thought—Roy said,

“You can go home with me to-day? There’s no one here—”

Joe had been warned by the home authorities to come home from school directly—or else they knew he had been kept in. Joe did give this dictum a thought—“But this is different, of course,” he argued. “Won’t their eyes stick out when they know!”

“Sure,” he answered Roy, “but I got to wash my hands first.” He had happened to glance at his grubby fists, and, for the first time in his life, he awoke to the fact that they were dirty—chalky,

grimy, inky, and muddy, and all other possible variations and combinations. He remembered that all of Roy's family wasn't blind.

So he gave his tie a twitch, and ruffled his fingers through his heavy hair, in hopes it would lie flat. (It didn't.) He wished now that he carried a comb in his pocket, like some of the "dandies" in the class; but hitherto he had scorned such effeminate luxuries.

"He won't ask me in, anyway—I c'n say I got to hurry home—that's no lie!—It's just to take him to his door," he thought as he joined the patiently waiting Roy.

But when the half-hour walk to Roy's home was ended, and Joe stood on the steps of a brownstone house, Joe found it was not so easy to escape. He intended to wait only till some one answered the bell, then deliver his charge and bolt.

A neat, pink-cheeked maid opened the front door.

"Come on in, Joe," said Roy. "Where's mother?"

Joe looked around almost as if to escape. He hadn't planned on meeting "mothers and things" he muttered to himself. Surreptitiously, he tried to tuck his soiled shirt-sleeves up under his coat. "Say, Roy, some other time—" he muttered, hopelessly.

"Oh, no. Mother will be so anxious to see you. Here she comes, now."

There was a rustle of silk draperies, a sweet, intangible waft of perfume—and the sweetest, gentlest lady, almost too young-looking to be Roy's mother, stood before him. She was dressed in something gray and filmy, with trimmings of white lace that looked like frost on the window-pane. She took her big boy by both shoulders.

"How's the new school?" she inquired anxiously.

"Dandy! And, mother—this is my guide—Joe Darby."

Was there the slightest lift of her delicate eyebrows, in question? Joe wasn't sure, for his own eyes fell to the floor in embarrassment. He got through the handshake somehow—how, he could not tell.

"Dr. Cunningham recommended him, mother, and so did his teacher, Miss Scott," went on Roy. "I'm in luck: for they were certainly right about it. We've tried studying together already."

"You are in all of Roy's classes, of course?" asked the clear, sweet voice.

"Yes'm," Joe's own voice sounded to him as gruff and loud as if he were talking into an empty barrel.

"Have you ever done this sort of thing before?" she asked.

"No'm."

"But you think it won't be bothersome—or difficult?"

“No’m.”

By now she must have realized some of Joe’s abject misery: for she asked Joe no more questions, but said to Roy:

“Take him up to your room, and I’ll send Norah up.” Then she turned to watch them go upstairs, with one hand on the newel-post.

It was then that Joe, daring to lift his eyes, saw her beautiful rings. Diamond rings happened to be one of her pet delights, and being rich, she could gratify it. Joe could hardly keep his eyes from the beautiful jewels.

There were several rings on the white hand. One large solitaire, as big as a pea, flashed fire as her fingers moved absently: there was a circlet of five smaller stones, and a horseshoe of seven, that glittered gloriously, like a thousand imprisoned rainbows. They were beautiful stones, white and full of fire. How Dick would enjoy seeing them, thought Joe; he was so crazy about diamonds that his pals often called him Diamond Dick.

Roy led the way up a flight of stairs to a large, pleasant room overlooking a fine garden in the rear. Everything was so rich, so luxurious, that Joe again fell into abject misery.

“He won’t want *me*,” he thought miserably. “He *can*’t want—*me*!”

Some one knocked on the door; then the rosy-cheeked servant entered with a tray.

“Right on the table, Norah,” Roy’s hands flut-

tered over the table deftly, and removed a stray paper. "What is it? I'm starving."

"Cocoa, an' sandwiches, an' cake an' apples," answered Norah. "Shall I pour the cocoa, Master Roy?"

"No: Joe will do that. Thank you, Norah; and tell mother we're going to study."

As they ate and chattered, Joe forgot his shyness, forgot his discomfort, forgot the "difference" between them in the way of money, that made him want to close up like an oyster—and felt only that they were two boys of the same age, who were going to be very close comrades for the next few months.

After the repast—plates and cups and chocolate-pot were quite empty when they finished—they tackled the Latin lesson again, and, much to Joe's joy, managed to make up the lost lesson that bothered Roy, and prepare the lesson for the morrow.

"How did you ever learn how to?" asked Joe, admiringly.

"How to—what?"

"Why,—to—to go at a lesson the way you do. Who showed you how?" explained Joe, finding it somewhat hard to explain just what he meant.

"Why—nobody. It was just there to be done, and so I did it. It was my loss if I didn't get it. How else would you learn Latin and be sure of it?"

But I daresay there *are* lots of easier ways—for other boys,” and he stifled a tiny sigh.

That was the reason! “It was there to be done, so I did it!” said Roy. “My loss if I didn’t.” To Joe, a lesson was a thing to be—skimmed over, or dived under, or sneaked through, or dodged around—any way, over or under or through or around, of getting past it, and not be annoyed too much by his teachers for failure to learn. *His* loss if he didn’t? Not once had *that* idea ever entered Joe’s head! Wasn’t it his teachers’ business to *see* that he did it: and *their* loss, if anybody’s, if they didn’t attend to the business they were paid for? Why, weren’t they *paid* to *make* him learn? And was *he* paid to learn? Once more Joe “saw a light.” “Let your teacher do the worrying,” evidently wasn’t a part of Roy’s philosophy.

They studied together till it began to grow dark. Joe had to confess to himself, of an actual interest in the lesson: and he mentally dedicated this evening to “jacking himself up” in the things in which he was deficient.

“Jiminy! I’m in for a grind, all right,” he said to himself, as Roy left him for a moment at his mother’s call. For a moment he wondered idly whether he wanted to tackle it. Then he heard something that made him sorry he had had that regretful thought, and certain as to what he wanted.

Roy had shut the door behind him, as he passed into his mother's room: but there was a ventilator which carried broken phrases of their talk to Joe.

"Are you sure it was Dr. Cunningham that recommended him?"

"Why, yes, mother," answered Roy.

"Well, you know . . ." Joe could catch only snatches ". . . only a trial: and if you don't like . . . don't have to. . . ."

"I *shall*," said Roy, emphatically. "I know I shall."

"We-ell," answered Mrs. Manners, in dubious tones that made Joe flush. "I think you've worked long enough this afternoon."

So, ten minutes later, Joe was racing for home as fast as his feet could carry him.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT BECAME OF JOE'S DOLLAR

IT was past six when at last he bolted, three steps at a time, up the four flights to the Darby flat. His father would be at home. Yes, Joe could hear him talking in the kitchen. So much the better.

"I've told him times enough, to come straight home," he was announcing loudly. "If he's been cuttin' up again—" Joe scarcely heard his words. In he dashed, intent to tell his good news. He was astounded to find himself collared.

"Didn't I tell ye always to come straight home from school, ye good-for-nothing," demanded Mr. Darby with a shake. "Where ye been? If ye was kep' in for cuttin' up—"

Joe gasped. Was this how he had planned to announce proudly his dollar a week?

"I got a job—" he began. But that only increased the difficulty. He didn't even get a chance to explain.

"You left school to get a job? I'll tend to you. Lemme alone, ol' woman," for Joe's mother began to plead for him. "You ain't *left* school; you been kicked out, that's what: and t'ought if you

get a job before you come home, that would save your skin! Wha'd I promise you if you got kicked out o' school? Eh?"

"I didn't get kicked out," said Joe, sullenly. Oh, what was the use of anything!

"What then?"

"You might listen to me first," complained the boy—forgetting how many reasons he had given his father in the past, to make him believe just what he did. "Dr. Cunningham has given me a job in school, as guide to a blind boy that's just entered. I take him around, and read to him, an' help him study—"

"*You* help any one study!" interrupted Dick, sneeringly. He had been hanging around, eagerly waiting to see Joe "catch it" and now he actually looked disappointed. "Ho! The blind man on the corner has a little yaller pup to lead *him* round."

"Shut up, you," said his father, savagely. Then he added, more gently, "Go on, Joe."

"That was why I'm late. I had to take him home, and then he wanted me to help him do some lessons—read them to him, you know," explained Joe, modestly, "an' then his mother came in, an' talked a long time. I got away as soon as I could. They pay me a dollar a week for it."

"Really, Joe?" exclaimed his mother. "Oh, Joe! I thought you'd been put out o' school, an'—an' didn't dare come home, and we'd lost you—"

like Jack." She patted his shoulder timidly, wiping a tear on her apron. Joe flushed as he thought how near it came being true.

"Needn't worry about that," he muttered. "Do you think I'm like Jack? An' I won't lose that job, either, as Dick does all the jobs *he* gets." He couldn't resist a knock at Dick, after the way Dick acted toward him. "You *don't* think I'm like Jack, or Dick—*do* you?" he demanded of his father.

"You've been goin' on at school just the way both of 'em did," answered his father slowly. "Just 'fore they quit on their own hook an' went to the dogs. I'll be thankful if you're diffrent, but I ain't countin' on it too much."

Joe felt his face grow hot again. Some of Dr. Cunningham's words came back to him. "Mean on your parents—" Was that what he meant? *Had* they been—*worrying* over him? Why didn't they show they cared, then! But had he showed *he* cared? "A feller's folks are queer things," thought Joe. "Well, maybe *he* seemed as queer to them," and he sighed at the tremendous puzzle it all was.

Sis called to him then, from the next room. She fairly clutched him round the neck: and Joe could feel her arms tremble.

"I'm so glad—you didn't run away," she whispered. (How they all thought he'd run away from consequences, like a coward, thought Joe.)

"Are you, Sis?" he mumbled.

"Though I shouldn't have blamed you," she added, in a lower whisper. "Oh! Dad was awful mad to-night. I—I almost *didn't* want you to come. I'll never forget the last time father—I think it hurt me more than you. And mother, too."

Joe remembered shame-facedly what it was for, that he had earned "a good one," and hurt Sis and his mother so. He and a gang of other boys had had an afternoon's fun, stoning the windows of a vacant house. They had been caught, and their fathers had paid for the glass. "Golly!" he said aloud. He began to see himself as if he were another boy; and he began to think that other fellow was a mean sort of chap.

"Don't worry, Sis," he said proudly, "I've got beyond needin' 'em. I'm a wage-earner now."

"What do you mean? Oh, you haven't left school?"

Why were they all so daffy about school, thought Joe. But he assured her he hadn't: in fact, that wild horses couldn't tear him away from school now.

"Then," she whispered, "oh, Joe, do you know what that means to me? For two years father's been tryin' to save up to send me away for a week in the country. That was why he was so angry when you broke those windows. He had to pay—out of that!"

"I'm—sorry," he jerked out. "Sis—honest, I *haven't* been sorry till this minute. I just thought I had my fun and I paid for it. I thought *he* was just *mad!*"

"Well; hurry up and get your supper—ma's callin'—so you can come back and tell me all about this blind boy. It'll be something brand new for me to think of. You've got to tell me *all* about him, every single little bit."

When Joe got out into the kitchen again, he approached his father.

"Say, could I—" he was surprised to find he was more shaky than if he were "in for a good one"—"As long as you weren't countin' on—my earnin's" (how proud he was of that word) "could I put it all with what you're savin' for Sis to go to the country?"

Mr. Darby choked over his tea.

"Sure," he said hoarsely, without looking up. Joe wondered if this question had displeased him; though he couldn't see why it should.

Joe's account of his adventures occupied everybody's attention during the evening meal. He had no idea his folks could be so interested in his doings. Needless to say, there were several items which he omitted—some of which, he felt, were the most important events of a very eventful day; but they concerned him only.

Dick sulked by himself. He didn't like to have his "kid brother" the center of attention and com-

mendation. Dick had an account of a match he had witnessed—and lost money on—between Slugger Jones and Brute Dempsey. He tried to relate it; but nobody paid any attention to *him*. He was the only one of the circle that didn't overwhelm Joe with questions. Even Sis, when he went to sit with her, asked him a round dozen.

Joe had to describe, in the minutest detail, Roy, Roy's home, and Roy's mother. But there was one detail he didn't finish. He was answering his mother's questions as to how Mrs. Manners was dressed, and he plunged with enthusiasm into a description of her rings.

Joe was sitting next to Mr. Darby; and the first thing he knew, the man's boot caught him in the ankle in an emphatic kick.

"Golly," he gasped; for it hurt. "Now, what was that for?" He looked round the table in question as he rubbed his shin. In a second he had met Dick's eyes—and knew.

He had never seen Dick look like that before. His careless insolence was gone; and he was strangely earnest. His eyes glittered, greedily and excitedly. There was a wolfish look to his whole expression that reminded Joe of a starving dog he had once tried to feed, which had bitten the hand that held out the food.

Joe knew that Dick was sometimes called Diamond Dick by his pals—why, Joe didn't exactly know. There was a hidden story behind it, which

Dick didn't *want* anybody to know. He certainly owned no diamonds; and although he sometimes talked of how he was going to "make his pile" as a diamond-trader, he lacked the opportunities. For a diamond-trader must either have stones—or a stone—of his own to start trading with, or enough of a reputation to make other people trust him with theirs: and Dick had neither. However, he professed to a great knowledge of diamonds; and nothing pleased him better than to stand before a jeweler's window and discuss the display as to "flaws" and "off-colors" and "blue-whites" to any one willing to listen.

Dick's expression scared Joe. He felt unwilling to go on—why, he could scarcely tell.

A question from Mrs. Darby set Joe's paralyzed wits and tongue to working again.

"Oh, yes; she had a lot—two or three. I guess maybe they were fake. I didn't notice particular." But the harm was done. Joe knew Dick knew he was bluffing.

After supper Joe took his books. It was a bigger pile than he usually brought home.

"Don't you want to come to the movies?" invited Dick. "I'll treat."

"Got to study," answered Joe, slamming down one book so hard that the cover parted company with the inside.

"Study! You!" hooted Dick, with the superior sneer on his lips that Joe often tried to imitate,

because it was so irritating. Then he slammed the door behind him.

Joe scratched his head in puzzled wonder. Dick didn't generally bother himself with his "nuisance of a kid brother" as he called Joe; especially when it meant *his* treat. Joe was sorry he couldn't go. He had always wanted to be better chums with Dick. There were many things about Dick that he admired. To be quite candid, however, they were chiefly his impudent self-assurance of manner, his insolent swagger, and his familiar way of talking of several of the lesser lights of the prize-ring, with whom he had a speaking acquaintance.

"Now he's mad because I wouldn't go," thought Joe. "I'll bet he's makin' up to me because he's planning to borrow my dollar a week. Nix!" Joe knew that Dick's was a forcible kind of borrowing that meant no return. "That's why he's soft-soapin' round. Never asked me to the movies before. Well, he won't be round to bother to-night." And he put together the parted *Essentials of Latin*, and found the page.

Dick gone, there was no distraction to keep him from studying. He was surprised to find how easy it came, after going over it with Roy. He tried Roy's method of study as a sort of experiment. It went so well that he tried it on his algebra and his biology. It worked like a charm. The clock struck, and struck again; Joe never

heeded. He used to time himself, and never permitted himself to run over the thirty minutes the school expected him to give to each study. If he couldn't finish a lesson in the required time—why, so much the worse for the lesson!

Mr. Darby smiled over his pipe. "Boys is quare critters," he meditated. "Look a' that, now!" Joe found he had some time left over, so he turned back to the first page of the *Essentials of Latin* and began reviewing from the beginning.

At last he was interrupted by an irrepressible laugh from Sis. He looked up, as if just awakened from a dream, and went in at her command.

"Oh, Joe, you're a funny boy!" she laughed merrily. "I've had my supper, and a nap, and I've been watching you for a full half-hour by the clock. And you've never looked up once."

"I'm goin' to keep this job," he said, doggedly, remembering what it meant to Sis.

As if she read his thought, she reached out a thin hand and clasped his.

"I heard what you said to dad—about that dollar—"

"Oh, forget it!" he interrupted.

"I wish I *could* go to the country—*next* summer!" Here it was only November, with a late autumn still lingering: and the patient little girl was already looking forward hopefully to "next summer."

"I'm not going to make you feel uncomfortable by saying—Oh, what I'm not going to say," as Joe grew red and would have bolted. "Only—don't you think it's fair, if I get the benefit, I ought to help you—if I could. *Couldn't* I hear you recite things, and help you study, *some way*? It would be *such* fun—"

Joe thought of poor little Sis, in bed all day long, and felt decidedly "wiggly inside," as he expressed it, at her idea of *fun*.

"But, Sis," he giggled, "I don't see where the *fun* comes in."

"You don't know how good it would seem to be some *use* to somebody," in spite of herself, her tones were full of longing.

Joe privately didn't think much of a girl's help in Latin. But he humored her, as he always did.

"Sure you can help. I was just reviewin' words. S'pose you tell the English, an' see if I know the Latin." He brought the battered book, and turned to page 1.

"Latin! Oh, my!" she was so awed at his superior wisdom that he went up several pegs in his own estimation.

"And you keep a pencil handy, and any word you don't know you put down."

"Sis, you've got some furniture in your attic," he cried, in real admiration. *He* never would have thought of that particular trick in a hundred

years; and this time it was Sis who went up in his estimation.

"Look-a-here. D'ye know what time it is?" broke in Mr. Darby's voice, after they had worked for some time, with many delays while Joe stopped to use the very necessary pencil.

"Goodness! 'Leven o'clock! I mustn't keep Sis awake," cried Joe.

"But I had a nap after supper, and I can sleep as late as I want to in the morning. *Do* do it often, Joe. It's lots of fun. Shall we go from here to-morrow?" she asked eagerly.

"Only Lesson Ten?" asked Joe in some surprise, as she showed him the page.

"We had to stop so many times, you know," she said, slyly. "Let's see how many words you didn't know."

"Didn't number 'em," muttered Joe. He had hoped she wouldn't ask for the list.

"Well; I can count." Her inexorable hands demanded, and received, the fatal paper. Out of ten lessons, with an average of a dozen words to a lesson, Joe found he didn't know—fifty-one of them!

"But some o' those—I didn't know just the gender. That ain't fair."

"Yes, 'tis," said Sis, firmly. "You either know 'em, or you don't. Half or quarter doesn't count."

Joe was so tired that night that it was two o'clock before he could go to sleep. As if that wasn't enough, his father had given him a problem to solve that had helped keep him awake.

"Joe!" he said, suddenly and sharply, as they happened to be alone in the kitchen for an instant.

"What?"

"I want ye to mind this," Mr. Darby's voice was fearfully earnest. "*Don't ye—tell—Dick—* where that there feller lives!"

"Why-y—why should he want to know?"

"Humph! Mind what I say now. Don't let him worm it out o' ye, or trick it out o' ye, or scare it out o' ye!"

"You don't think—" began Joe. He couldn't utter the thought that had entered his head.

"I ain't no business thinkin', ner you ain't, neither. Quit it. Only mind what I say."

And Mr. Darby took up his pipe again, to show it was a closed matter.

CHAPTER V

PLUNGING IN

JOE awoke the next morning, for the first time in his life eager to go to school. He washed and dressed rather more elaborately than usual—that is, he splashed about an enormous amount of water and soap, and surprised the family at breakfast with his clean shirt, bright necktie, and hair plastered down in a most unusual fashion for *him*. Joe hated clean shirts: generally his mother had to argue, coax, wheedle, or—most successful method—coerce by abstracting the one he had been wearing, so he *had* to take a clean one from the drawer.

“Good morning, Little Stranger. What you got on your hair?” shouted Dick. “I’d never know you.”

“Soap, and lots of it,” responded Joe, cheerfully, with the equanimity of one at peace with all the world.

“I should say so. It’s fairly sticky,” and Dick undid Joe’s morning work by ruffling it with unnecessary thoroughness and violence.

Joe was so cheerful that he even smiled under this. “Now you look like a wet cat, instead of a licked kitten,” commented Dick, trying to add

insult to injury; and indeed, Joe did look comical: for the thick soap stuck various strands together, and made them point stiffly in all directions.

For the first time in his life, too, Joe—having privately slicked his hair down again till it shone like a well-groomed horse's sides—started for school ahead of time; ran instead of walked; and whistled instead of glowering dismally.

For the first time also, he carried the comfortable knowledge that every lesson was done. Joe was surprised to find what a good feeling inside that simple fact gave him. There was nothing to dread, nothing to worry about. No longer need he calculate whether Geometry Jones (so named because of her angular build—and disposition—as well as the subject she taught) would begin on the near or the far side of the room, and whether she would get to him; or whether he would be called on for one of the two Latin sentences he had done, or one of the thirteen that he hadn't. There was no fear of being "picked off by the enemy" any more.

He reached school just as the gates were unlocked—he who had been late nine times the previous term! He was to wait for Roy in the front hall. But when he sat down on the visitor's bench in the hall, he found the suspicious janitor—who knew Joe Darby of old—would have none of it.

"That's the visitor's seat—clear out. You've

got no business anywhere but in your room," he snarled.

"I have to wait here, honest, for the new blind boy. I'm his guide. He comes in the front door, and I have to meet him here," protested Joe—none too gently, it is to be feared. To be put out, in that rough way, when you had a right—!

"Haff to nothin'," the janitor replied. "*You* guide to a poor chap that can't see! You'd guide him into trouble, all right." Here he became pugnacious, and grabbed his broom-handle like a bludgeon. "Clear out o' here, or I'll r-r-report ye."

And just at this critical moment Dr. Cunningham entered the front door.

"Good-morning, Darby," he said, cheerfully. "It's all right, Mr. Growling. This boy has special permission to wait here every morning till the blind lad comes. But you're here early, aren't you, Joe?"

"I thought Roy would probably be early, sir. I didn't want him to get here and not find me."

"Then you don't go for him in the morning?"

"No, sir. His father's office boy lives near, and brings him mornings on the way to work. But I take him home afternoons, and then stay and help him study."

"I see. That's a good arrangement." Dr. Cunningham vanished into his office with another smile: and "Wow!" thought Joe, "wasn't it *great*

to have the principal speak to a feller *like that!*”—friendly and smiling and interested. He got another shock of the same pleasant kind when Miss Scott came and said good-morning in precisely as friendly tones. She smiled even more, to herself, as she passed out again, and saw Joe, oblivious to everything, with his book open, studying.

Roy came fairly early. Joe was glad, for he had had an encounter that vexed him. In came Miss Seymour—the one teacher of the previous term for whom he had cared to behave. She looked at him inquiringly, and then went over to him.

“You’re not in trouble again, are you, Joe?” she asked reproachfully. How happy Joe was to be able to look up unashamed, and answer,

“No’m, I’m not. I’m goin’ to be guide to the new blind boy. I’m waitin’ for him.”

“Really?” she said, enthusiastically. “Isn’t that fine! How did such good fortune happen to fall to you?”

What Joe liked about Miss Seymour was, that she never kept giving him sly verbal digs at his reputation. In her last question, there had been no sneer nor slur, as some people might have said it: only hearty congratulation. How proud Joe was to answer,

“Dr. Cunningham did it—dunno how—”

“Isn’t that fine!—to be chosen for that—to be trusted with somebody helpless! Come and tell

me how you get on, and bring him with you." She left him with a smile and a nod.

"Bet I will!" thought Joe. Then Geometry Jones stood before him.

"What's this I hear about *you*?" her acid tones contrasted with Miss Seymour's kind ones. "*You* going to be guide to a poor helpless blind boy! How did that ever come to happen to *you*!"—almost Miss Seymour's words, but how different. "Well, I'm *sorry* for him, that's all! *I* can't see how they ever permitted it," and she flounced away.

"Yah!" said Joe to himself. "That's right! Hit a feller when he's down and tryin' to climb up!" Worse than Miss Jones' words, was the fear that others would think the same, and would not hold their tongues in Roy's presence—that Roy would learn that his guide—whom *he* had treated in such a friendly, trustful fashion—was "tough Joe Darby," the bad boy of the school. "Oh, he *mustn't* find it out!" thought Joe, clenching his fists. Then he thought of Mrs. Manners' words and his anxiety increased. "I can lick the fellers, all right," thought poor Joe, "but I *can't* lick Miss Jones nor Mrs. Manners!"

Roy came at last, and greeted Joe joyfully. Joe dreaded the first ten minutes before school began, when his old friends would come up to him and perhaps let fall some of the truths Joe didn't want Roy to know. But, for to-day at least, that worry

slipped by. As soon as they had entered the room—before any one had time to say anything—Miss Scott called Roy and Joe to her, and took all the time till the bell rang getting information about Roy that she needed for her records, and asking about his studies at the other school.

So Joe was safe from his friends' questions for two whole periods, till the 10.30 recess. That had always seemed a long way off at nine o'clock; but now it seemed threateningly imminent.

Yesterday it had seemed very hard to keep his mind from wandering during the long forty minutes of Latin and of Algebra. To-day he was astonished to find how easy it was. Another astonishing thing was the fact that everything his teachers said meant something to Joe. This connection between what they said and what he knew was at first a most astounding fact. When Joe was called on—not as though he was expected to know the answer, but because Miss Jones was going down the alphabetical list in her book, getting a recitation-mark for each pupil—Joe surprised every one, except Roy, by rising and giving a perfect recitation. Miss Jones actually rose from the teacher's desk and walked over to the aisle where Joe was sitting, and looked at him with eagle eye. Joe knew she expected he had a text-book hidden where he could "refresh his memory"; and he thought she seemed disappointed not to catch him.

At the ten-minute recess, the class counselor and representative came over to introduce themselves to Roy. So Joe was spared any explanations this time.

At noon, however, Jolly Saunders came to him, while Roy was busy talking to Miss Scott.

"In for a grind, hey?" he asked, in a casual fashion.

Joe was glad to declare his position openly. "Looks like it, doesn't it?" he answered, decidedly.

"Can't you ever have any fun any more?" asked Saunders, pityingly.

"Depends on what you call fun," replied Joe, stoutly. "Maybe earnin' money's fun to some folks."

"Or what you spend the money for, eh?"

Like a flash Sis came to Joe's mind. "You bet!" he answered; so emphatically that his friend wondered what it was Joe was saving up for.

Simon Katz was his next encounter. Simon was the most lazy, mischievous, impudent, and mean boy in the class. "You're a slick one," he said.

"Why?" demanded Joe.

"Gettin' a job like that. Bet you're goin' to let us have some fun with that feller soon's he gets to trust you—yes?"

"No, I'm not, you coward," retorted Joe, enraged. "Anybody that bothers Roy has got *me* to answer for it—understand, you little shrimp?"

"Oh, yess, sure—I wass only joking, anyways," apologized Simon, edging away. Joe knew he would report this to the rest of the gang, and he was glad *that* point was also settled. For Joe was the biggest and strongest boy in the class, and they did as he said without question.

"How easy it is!" he thought, as the day flew by and other days like it. He felt firmly entrenched in his new position: his friends understood, and Roy had not learned of his previous reputation, either from pupils or teachers.

Almost every day he learned something new from Roy.

"Before we go home, I want to go to Miss Jones' room," said Roy one day that week. "You know which it is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; but what are you going there for?" asked Joe.

"Don't understand these square-root things one little bit; want to ask her to explain them."

Joe's jaw dropped in real amazement. He had found Roy right in many ways, the past week, on points where they disagreed; but he just *couldn't* be right this time. He'd never seen Geometry Jones' face, so he couldn't know.

"You're crazy," he assured Roy.

Roy laughed. "Now, why am I crazy?"

"Go *tell* her you don't understand!"

"Why not?"

"You're not such a chump as to *go and tell* her

you don't understand something she's taught you?" repeated Joe.

"Well, tell me why I shouldn't?"

"Why—why—then she'd *know* it. Keep dark, and maybe she'll never notice. Or maybe you'll catch on."

Roy laughed heartily. "What is she there for but to explain if I don't understand? You'll see."

"I know Geometry Jones. *You'll* see," foreboded Joe.

But Roy was right. Roy went in to her and explained that he didn't understand, and would she please help him—and to Joe's surprise she didn't "snap his head off," but went through the explanation so patiently and kindly that Joe realized that *he* hadn't understood it before, but hadn't known enough to know it. In three minutes they were both working away at the board (Roy could work on the board with help in reading) and Geometry Jones' grim face actually bore a smile.

Again Joe said "How easy it is!" It had, in fact, been so far so easy to do right, to break away from his old companions, and to shed his old reputation as if it had never existed, that he began to feel uneasy. Sometimes his uneasiness took the form of being ashamed because it was easier than he deserved; but again it troubled him as a worry about the future. "It just *can't* keep up," was his secret fear, "and then—what?"

CHAPTER VI

A NEW BOY

TWO or three weeks passed in the same calm fashion. Joe worked hard in school, worked hard with Roy, and worked hardest of all at home, studying and reviewing—making up all the things he had willfully neglected in the past. It would be impossible to say how many times Joe called himself a fool as he did this last penance. But it was Sis who helped him here—patiently, faithfully, encouragingly,—and inexorably! He might fool himself into thinking he knew some rule; but he couldn't fool Sis!

Then—because habit is always stronger than desire—Joe began to chafe at the steady grind of hard work. Under the novelty of Roy's acquaintance, the pride of earning money, the joy that this money gave Sis—Joe had plunged in and worked like a Trojan, as he had never worked before. But the novelty, the pride, the enthusiasm, began to wear off presently; and Joe's old habits of laziness and indolence began to assert themselves once more. Several times, when he saw the pages and pages of Latin to be learned before the end of the term, the pages and pages

of examples to be worked, the pages and pages of English to be read and written about—he caught himself wondering vaguely if it were all worth while. Sis again! Of course it was worth while—for *her*.

Then, too, he missed the fun he used to have with his old chums. Time and again he yearned to be with them, when he heard them planning mischief. He began to feel lonely and “out of it”; and he also felt hurt—though he would scarce own it to himself—that they had dropped him from their number so willingly, so completely, and so quickly. He could not forget that he had been “tough Joe Darby,” their leader; and he felt hurt that *they* could forget it so easily.

Besides the work and the loneliness, there was another thing that tempted Joe sometimes to give it all up. The month’s trial was not up yet. Joe felt vaguely that Mrs. Manners did not wholly approve of him; and he feared lest she should dismiss him after all his struggling. There were many moments when only the thought of Sis and her fund kept him from “chucking the whole thing.”

Joe had not been stupid enough to think he could make this mighty change in himself without a struggle; though he had not realized what a tremendous change it really was. But he expected the battle would be one quick, sharp, glorious charge, and soon over. He had not counted on a

slow, inch-by-inch advance in darkness, with a weary struggle over every inch gained, and another weary struggle to keep it. Nor did he realize that there comes a place in every race or every struggle, where the breath comes with difficulty, and the only thing to be done is to keep on—doggedly, stubbornly—till the thing called “second-wind” comes at last, and the hardest spot in the whole course is passed. Joe had just now lost his first breath, and was struggling now for “second-wind.” And again Sis helped, simply by believing in him.

Boys drift in and out of the various schools as families move, or schools become crowded or emptied. Several changes had been made in Miss Scott’s class that term. Most of the newcomers were of the ordinary type; but the last admission was different enough to make up for it.

Into the room one day, bearing a yellow admit slip, walked a big fellow in long trousers. It didn’t seem to abash *him*, that he was as big and as old-looking as most of the school Seniors. Indeed, he seemed rather going to lord it over the “little fellers” on that very account!

Joe didn’t like him from the first look. He had the same insolent, undisciplined, swaggering air that Dick had. He had nervous wrinkles across his forehead, and a nervous habit of moving his eyebrows up and down. His fingers were stained with nicotine, and he had the habit of snapping

them repeatedly, as if he were a veteran crap player. Even as Miss Scott was questioning him, he was winking and grinning every time she turned away.

He took the seat she assigned him, tossed his books into the desk as if *they* were of no importance, shot his cuffs up and down, stuck out his legs, pulled up his trousers, and whistled. Even the old "tough Joe Darby" never reached such heights of toughness.

Like flies around a honey-jar, the new-comer—Foley was his name—was soon surrounded by all the fun-loving, mischievous, and disorderly boys of the class. He and Simon Katz had gravitated together before two minutes had elapsed, as surely as iron goes to a magnet. Before an hour had passed, Foley had his chance to show his colors out and out.

It happened Miss Wheeler was absent visiting schools that day, and a substitute took her place. The substitute was young and inexperienced-looking. Foley measured her at a glance, and when she rapped for order he insolently kept on talking.

Miss Scott had a seating-plan of the class on the desk; so the substitute located him, and said, "Foley, you are talking."

Foley looked around at his neighbors with a grin. "She knows my name," he uttered, aloud.

"Didn't you hear me call for order?"

Foley rose with an expression of injured innocence.

"He asked me a question and I had to answer it."

Foley's friends guffawed.

"You had to answer it!"

"Yes: 'twould be rude not to," explained Foley, with elaborate innocence.

Another guffaw. My, how he had drawn a following in that short time! Yet his behavior was so perfect in its insolence, that Joe gave a chuckle and turned to look at him, too.

Then he felt Roy stir, and he turned back. Roy gave a sigh, and said, "Oh, have we got that kind here now! I left the other school because they'd take such nonsense."

Then Foley changed his innocent tone to a belligerent one.

"I wasn't the only one talking," he argued, impudently.

"I didn't say you were," said the substitute, wearily. She had heard this particular brand of performance one hundred and one times in her career as substitute.

"Well, I want my rights," muttered Foley, aloud.

The substitute was a person of experience. She ignored Foley's remark, drew a pink card from her bag: inscribed it swiftly and said, "Come here."

Foley came: pretending to trip on a boy's feet as he went up the aisle, and stopping to argue about it with the boy and with the substitute.

"Take this to the office."

Foley whistled a bar of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," as he took it in his hand.

"'Silly and insolent behavior,'" he read aloud to the class in mocking tones. "That ain't true. I ain't silly, and I don't know what insolent means."

In this manner Foley contrived to have half the period wasted on his worthless self. Joe felt Roy fairly wince at each fresh burst of insolence. "Oh, I wish he'd quit," he murmured.

At noon time Foley came in with a dead mouse on a string. After tormenting the girls by swinging it round among them till they were glad to seek refuge in the hall, Foley drew his lieutenants together. By their glances at Miss Scott's desk, and by his own past personal experience, Joe knew pretty well what they were planning.

"Is he going to put it in Miss Scott's desk?" Joe asked the nearest plotter.

"Sure thing," laughed the other. "Won't she be scared!"

"See here," Joe sprang up, forgetting everything but the way Miss Scott's face looked the last time she had seen a mouse. "It won't make her *scared*; it'll make her faint, to see a mouse. I wouldn't do that."

"You wouldn't, would you, Parson," mocked Foley. They were the first words he had ever spoken to Joe. "Makes her faint, hey? How do you know, anyway; tried it yourself? Wouldn't miss doing it for anything now. Watch the door, some one." And, while Simon Katz sprang to guard the door, Foley tried desk-lid and drawer till he found one unlocked, and thrust the mouse in. Then he luckily sauntered to the window, to see if she were coming.

This was Joe's chance. With a bound he had reached the desk, yanked open the drawer, snatched the mouse, and flung it through the open window to the yard, three floors below.

"That's a cowardly trick," cried Joe, as Foley looked at him in blank amazement. "To think it's fun to scare a woman."

And just then, a moment later Miss Scott walked in the door. There was such a hubbub in the room Joe was sure she had not heard his words; but she could not help seeing his position.

"Joe Darby!" she exclaimed in amazement. "Did you open that drawer of my desk?"

"Yes'm," answered Joe, covered with confusion.

"Well, I—" she drew a long breath. "I can't say what I want to, here and now. I will see you after school to-day."

Joe was torn between worry that she had heard his words to Foley, and worry lest she hadn't. If

she had—he hated to be “fussed over”; if she hadn’t—he was up a stump, all right, through no fault of his own but a desire to help her. Opening a teacher’s desk during her absence was a pretty serious charge. And Joe *couldn’t* tell *why* he had opened it!

Joe sat at his desk, in dismal gloom, as the rest filed out. He was worried, too, about keeping Roy waiting. No knowing how long she would keep him in!

“Gittin’ your dose, sissy?” sneered Foley, as he passed Joe. “Serves you just right.”

Joe didn’t even look at him. The word sissy had sent Joe’s mind traveling off to *his* Sis, in bed at home, looking forward to next summer and the outing he was helping her get. And now!—of course, he would be deprived of his work with Roy. Mrs. Manners, with all her diamond rings, wouldn’t have a boy around that opened a teacher’s desk.

Then he asked himself—could it be possible he had ever thought of giving it up of his own accord? How could he have been such a fool! How could he break it to Sis?—that the money she was counting on was lost!

Miss Scott beckoned him to her.

“I just want to say—thank you. You know what for.” Joe blushed poppy-red. “I’ve told Dr. Cunningham about the improvement in your studies and everything” (wasn’t she a brick not

to mention behavior, though they both understood) "and he's very much pleased. Don't get discouraged, and don't get tired of working; will you? Because—you can do it. It's hard—even I don't know how hard. But you won't give up—will you?"

"No'm," promised Joe. Then he basely escaped.

Joe felt glad, though, he had made that promise. He had promised himself the same thing a hundred times, but to promise some one else—particularly Miss Scott—meant you couldn't fail after that.

But he could not escape Foley so easily. From now on, Joe, or Roy, was the butt of Foley's practical jokes. Joe kicked himself over and over for bringing this onto Roy; yet he could not quite see how he could have prevented it. For the next week, till he tired of it, Foley made Roy's—and consequently Joe's—life miserable by hiding his tablet and stylus. Joe told Foley without reserve what he thought of his meanness. Foley only laughed and sneered, or said impudently, "What are you going to do about it?" at some time, just before the bell rang, when Joe had no opportunity to *do* anything, no matter how much he ached to show what he felt like doing to him.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT

JOE felt sure things would come to blows between Foley and himself before long. Judging Foley by Dick, of whom he made Joe think time and again, Joe felt sure; judging Foley by the threats he had uttered about Joe to "his crowd," Joe felt doubly sure. Yet he was surprised that he didn't particularly worry about it, although Foley was far bigger and heavier, older and stronger, than he.

Joe had hoped it would come sometime when Roy was not under foot. But as that was a somewhat unusual situation, he was afraid it would not happen that way.

He had no idea, however, of the state of affairs in the Foley camp. He did not know that Foley's vanity, arrogance, and bullying ways had already made many of his followers a bit tired of him. Nor did he know that Foley, seeing it, felt the truth—that careless, good-humored, jolly Joe Darby, whose place as leader he had taken, had been better liked than he. This made Foley decide that a fight between himself and Darby, ending in

Darby's ignominious defeat, would please the boys and bring them back to him; and was therefore eminently desirable.

The occasion came sooner than either Joe or Foley had counted on it. Joe was going home with Roy at the close of school, arm in arm, as he always guided him. Foley happened to come out of school just behind them, and apparently followed. Joe could hear his voice behind, and his nerves grew tense; but he would not turn.

The sidewalk was narrow, with a strip of mud on each side of the pavement. Joe guessed that Foley would try to pass, as an excuse to jostle them. He did so, choosing a time when they were alongside a muddy puddle, pushing between Joe and Roy, rowdy-fashion, so roughly that he sent them both into the water. Then he turned to jeer at them as they picked themselves up—Joe awkwardly, and Roy helplessly.

"Don't you do that again," cried Joe, angrily.

"Just listen: he says I shan't do that again," mocked Foley, laughing at Joe in sneering contempt.

Joe glared straight into his eyes; and saw in them the same mean, contemptible, sneering look that he had so often seen in Dick's eyes when he was ugly-mad. Joe saw what was coming.

"And I'll see that you don't," promised Joe, still more hotly. Nothing made him so angry as Foley's—or Dick's—sneer.

“Oy, yoy,” mocked Foley, still grinning. “You will, will you?”

For answer Joe wasted no more words—he was getting too angry to speak—but went for Foley and struck him in the face.

The gasp of Foley’s friends was music in Joe’s ears. Foley was so big, so bold, that they dared not cross him; so they had no idea Joe would dare stand against him.

Foley backed into the group of his friends. A buzz of excitement and encouragement followed.

“Now give it to him, Foley.”

“Show him who’s runnin’ things—”

“He hit you first—”

“Oh, I’ll make cat’s meat of him,” boasted Foley, who now seemed furious at Joe’s daring. “Do you want to fight?” he demanded, making a theatrical motion as if to take off his coat.

“That’s just what I mean,” answered Joe.

“You want to start things *here*, so some of the teachers’ll come out and stop it.”

“Go where you please. I’ll be there,” was Joe’s grim answer.

It took but a moment to agree on a vacant lot with a high board fence, barely two blocks away. Towards this they started, Foley in the midst of his friends, Joe leading Roy, but otherwise alone. The excited voices brought other boys like bees; till it was quite a crowd that made a ring on the

uneven ground of the vacant lot. Foley flung his coat on a stone.

When Foley started to strip off his coat, Joe realized what sort of an opponent he had. Foley looked at least eighteen. His body was filled out like a man's. Joe, though as tall as he, looked what he was—tall, overgrown, and big-boned, but only an awkward boy of fifteen. There was such a difference between them that one of Foley's friends sneered,

"Ah, cut it out, Foley. Have a heart—he's only a kid!"

"If *he* wants to," answered Foley, with a similar sneer.

"You're afraid," retorted Joe, quickly.

"If you're goin' to fight, where are your seconds? I want to do this the proper way. You'll need 'em—to take you away afterwards."

Joe's heart sank, for the first time. Who *was* there in the school now, that would stand as his second? The better boys he knew would scorn him for what he had been; and of his old chums, those who were not followers of Foley would have nothing more to do with him because he had himself cast them off. There would be nobody—*nobody*, to care whether he won or lost, or to cheer him on in the fight if he were gaining the advantage. Well, maybe if he licked Foley— *If!* There was no *if* about it: he'd *got* to!

"I shan't be the one to be carried away," an-

swered Joe; and the bitterness in his heart came out in defiance of tone.

"Bully for you," said some one in the rear of the crowd. Joe shook back his hair and glared defiantly at Foley. And then the unexpected happened. Bob Norris—a boy in 2A grade, and his grade representative in the student self-governing body, pushed forward. He had never spoken to Joe before, except once in public reprimand.

"See here, he's got to have seconds. Will you, Fulton? And you, McGinn? As representative, I've got to make myself scarce before it begins; or I'd do it myself. But come back here a minute, will you, Darby?"

Joe went to them: outwardly as calm and unconcerned as ever; inwardly feeling as if the world were turning topsy-turvy.

"You're not afraid?" asked Bob Norris. "He's a whole lot bigger than you," he added, critically, measuring them both again, much to Joe's irritation.

"No, I'm not," answered Joe, emphatically; but not emphatically enough to convince himself.

"But see here," he added. "I'm not worryin' about myself, but if—say, will you look out for Roy here, and take him home if—"

"Sure," said the three in chorus. "Don't think about that."

Then Bob Norris went on:

"We want you to give *him* one walloping, that'll

shut him up. He thinks he can come here and run things. He's made too much of a nuisance of himself. But we'd rather have it a 1-B boy that does it; and you're the biggest chap in 1-B. It's up to you—for the school. And the school's behind you."

"You bet it is," echoed McGinn.

"And lemme tell you one thing," chimed in Fulton. "You needn't be afraid of him."

"*What?*" demanded Joe.

"Because *I* know he's nothing but a big, bluffing coward. He's a bully, and all bullies are cowards." Fulton lowered his voice: "Go for him—sail into him from the start. He thinks his size has you scared."

"Yes, that's right. Go for him at the beginning—and don't let up till he's licked so he'll remember it."

Foley was now ready—his coat off, showing his big shoulders; his sleeves up, showing a hard, big man's arm. Joe looked slouchier than ever with coat off; and his big hands dangled awkwardly from his big-boned wrist. Joe wondered how much his seconds really believed of what they said to him, and how much was pure encouragement.

"He's a long time gettin' ready," sneered Foley. "Somebody get him a hot water bottle for his cold feet. Are you ready, kid, yet?"

"I'm ready," answered Joe, stepping into the ring.

For a moment Joe was so excited that he felt as though some one were running pins and needles all over his face. He wondered if he turned white. He must have, for Foley stepped forward and his sneering smile broke over his face. That settled it. Joe rushed for him.

Joe never remembered the details of that fight. He knew that at the first that smile of Foley's made him so angry that he fought madly and blindly; with the result that Foley, who, Joe believed, had attended a prize-fight or two, and knew a few tricks of feinting and dodging—succeeded in getting a right to Joe's eye, and a left to Joe's body, that made Joe realize he must fight with more care. Then all of a sudden a feeling swept over Joe—a feeling that he was going to win. He couldn't explain the how nor why of it. He couldn't describe it; it wasn't a proud, boasting kind of feeling—just a *sureness*. It made him stop his mad rushes and his futile arm-swinging, and think out how he was going to do it.

Foley felt the change and grew warier. One of his tricks—that of scaring his opponent with his size and with his bluffing—had failed; and he felt, rather than knew, that his second trick, of getting his opponent angry with his sneers, would work no longer. While he drew back a bit, Joe reached him—once, twice, three times. Joe's eyes met his—and Joe saw the unmistakable look of fear in them.

"Why, it's easy," thought Joe. He didn't know he said it aloud, but Foley's face flushed a deep red, and he made a mad rush at Joe. Joe stopped him with one arm—then swung with the other—and Foley went down like a log.

Till then, it had been an unusually quiet fight—no cheering, no cries of encouragement. But noise broke loose then.

Foley's seconds rushed into the ring.

"Stand back—stand back," they cried. "Give him the count. He'll be up before ten."

"Sure," said Joe, calmly, stepping back, and wiping his face with one arm: for he had got a tap on the nose early in the fray.

But Foley didn't rise at ten, although he tried wildly; and at the word the ring was a ring no longer, but a wild mass of boys, all cheering like mad, and all trying to shake Joe's hand.

Joe couldn't understand his own calmness. Ten minutes ago, he would have given worlds to have some one cheer his name and shake his hand. Now—he turned and fled as soon as he could to his two seconds.

"How do I look?" he asked anxiously. He was thinking of both Mrs. Manners and Mr. Darby.

Fulton laughed. "*That's* the first question he asks!" he said gayly. "Any one got a glass?"

"I didn't bring my vanity-box with me to-day," answered McGinn, in lady-like tones that convulsed everybody around. "Anybody got any

face-powder to loan Darby?" he continued. "He doesn't need rouge."

The rest laughed hilariously. Then "Smitty," who carried a small glass in his pocket for the sole purpose of "throwing light on the subject" in Geometry Jones' class, proffered that well-known article.

"Golly," muttered Joe, as he saw his face: an eye fast-closing, a red nose, fast reddening, and a bruised jaw, fast blackening. His tone was so full of anxiety that McGinn asked sympathetically,

"You won't catch it at home, will you, for fighting?"

"Likely," answered Joe: but he was thinking of Mrs. Manners.

"Then come around to my dad's shop and let's fix you up a bit," offered Fulton.

"Will somebody take Roy home?" asked Joe. Fulton's offer would enable him to remove some of the marks of the fight, and to stay away till five, his usual time of coming home after study with Roy.

"I will," said Bob Norris, who had mysteriously appeared again on the scene with great suddenness. But he returned a moment later, saying, "He wants to see you first."

Joe went to where Roy was sitting.

"I heard 'em yelling—wanted to yell myself—" said Roy, awkwardly. He knew Joe got into this conflict over him, but he felt Joe wouldn't want

him to mention it. "So you're going to throw me over to-day?" he asked.

"If you don't mind—Norris will help you study. He said so," for Bob nodded as Joe spoke.

"Honest—did you get so banged up you don't feel—" asked Roy.

"Banged up! He could lick twenty Foleys all over again," put in Bob. "But the ugly brute tried to mark his face all he could, and we're going to repair him before he goes home."

"But Joe—you won't get into trouble at home over this, will you?"

"Oh, I'll explain," answered Joe, easily. "But you see, if your mother caught sight of me now, she'd never let you come within ten miles of me again."

Roy laughed. "I doubt that, seeing how it began," he said. His words were music in Joe's ears. "But I'll be good and go home. And I'll make Norris tell me all about it on the way."

In the back room of Fulton, Senior's, plumbing shop, they patched Joe up as best they could. But his damages, though not serious, were of the kind that demand time to make presentable. Foley had intended to mark his face, and he had succeeded. But, Joe thought grimly, Foley hadn't planned those marks should be reminders of a Foley defeat.

Well, it was over; and Roy was protected, and

Foley defeated. Joe wondered what would come of it otherwise—at home, and with Mrs. Manners.

Joe's mother was not a bit consoling. She lifted up her hands, then lifted up her voice and wept.

"I'm feard your pa will have somethin' to say. Why did you ever!" she wailed; and this was the burden of her complaints as she, in turn, tried to "fix Joe up."

Presently Dick came in. He stared, then laughed.

"Been fightin'?" he inquired, with interest.

"No; I've been playin' marbles," growled Joe. Dick reminded him too much of Foley.

"Who won? Not you, by the looks," he asked, without any delicacy about the question.

"Did, too."

"Who'd you fight?"

"Feller in school—named Foley."

Here Dick grew excited. "Foley? *Foley!*" he demanded. "Not Pete Foley? Why, he belongs to our boxing-club. *You* never licked Pete Foley!"

"That's his name."

"I don't believe you ever whipped Pete Foley."

Joe's grin was too positive to be mistaken. "Ask *him*," he said.

"Well, you'll catch it all right, for fightin', when the old man comes home," exulted Dick.

Joe took his books and retired to the front room.

Dick's repetition of his mother's words made him feel uneasy: though he knew one arose from malice, and the other from solicitude. However, his heart did give an extra thump as he heard the slam of the door, and, a moment later, Mr. Darby's voice. Joe sat still, not wanting to go out till he had to; though he could be sure Dick would tell the tale.

A ring at the bell startled them all. Joe heard his mother press the button that opened the front door, four flights down. But the bell rang again, long and continuously.

"Joe! Joe!" called Mr. Darby. "Go see what 'tis."

"I'm goin'," answered Joe. But he went into the hall by the front way, instead of going through the kitchen. A wild thought entered his head that perhaps Foley had brought a policeman to arrest him.

The postman's whistle blew long and noisily below. "Darby! Darby! D-a-a-r-r-r-by," he shouted.

"Coming," answered Joe. What could it be? They never received letters from any one.

"Special delivery for Darby," called the voice below. "Two of 'em. One for John Darby, one for Joe Darby."

Joe took them. They were alike, on dainty scented paper that made Joe think immediately of Mrs. Manners.

“She’s written, firing me,” he thought, bitterly. “After doin’ it all for *him*, too. She wouldn’t write to me for anything else.”

He was so occupied with thoughts of the letters that he forgot how he looked, and entered the kitchen.

“Howly Moses,” cried Mr. Darby. “What a mug! Been fightin’, hey? Fergit what I told you about fightin’?”

Joe passed him his letter silently. He felt he was dismissed by Mrs. Manners, and nothing further seemed to matter. Mr. Darby tore the envelope across with a huge thumb, and read it slowly, with a nod or two and a glance at Joe.

“Why don’t ye read yours?” he demanded at last, with a grin.

Joe gazed at his own letter open-mouthed. He had forgotten it. He tore it open and read:

My dear boy,

I have just learned the whole story from Bob Norris—of how you fought so bravely against a boy bigger than yourself, and of *why* you fought—for the sake of my son. I shall not try to thank you now for it. Bob tells me how badly you were bruised, and how you would not come home with Roy for that reason. As Bob reports there was something said among the boys about your getting into trouble at home because of your fighting—for Roy!—I am writing a letter to your father, which I shall send special delivery, with this.

Let us see you to-morrow without fail. Roy must not miss his usual study hour, you know,—

Joe looked up with a sigh of relief. His father's eyes were twinkling.

"There be fights—*and* fights," observed Mr. Darby, with concise eloquence.

CHAPTER VIII

SURETY

JOE went home with Roy for his first lesson after the fight, in much trepidation. His face still looked battered; and though he was not now afraid of being dismissed because of that, he was afraid of either shocking Mrs. Manners by his appearance, or of bringing down her pity so that she would "make a fuss" over him. Joe, like all boys, hated a fuss of that kind,—especially when it was something where he deserved it.

He was glad she wasn't there to greet them when they entered. They went straight to Roy's room, where they had luncheon, and then started to study as usual.

Joe was gratified and touched at the almost pathetic eagerness with which Roy received him. "Somehow, you and I seem to work together so easily," said Roy. "I couldn't get used to any one else."

A great hope sprang up in Joe's heart. Did it mean—but if it did, he'd have to have an interview with Mrs. Manners; and that was Joe's chief

dread just at present. He would even have chosen uncertainty, than certainty delivered with "a fuss."

By and by he began to breathe more easily. But he was not to escape; for presently Roy's mother entered.

Joe shifted in his chair and turned his face away; but she went straight for him, with outstretched hand. Yes: she did hesitate a second in shocked surprised when she saw his battered face!

"I'm so glad you're back. Roy has missed you. No, Roy, I'm not going to make a fuss over him—though why he should act ashamed of those 'honorable scars' is more than I can see," she laughed; for Joe still kept his head turned and his eyes down. "But perhaps he won't mind my saying this—how safe and secure I feel now about Roy, knowing he is with some one so strong and brave. Then there's something more I want to say. We started a month on trial, so that either of us could withdraw if we wanted to." (Joe's heart began to beat fast with hope.) "If Joe is willing, I'd like to have things settled, though the month isn't quite up yet. What about it, Joe? Do you want to keep on what you're doing for the rest of the year—perhaps longer?"

"Yes'm, " Joe had to clear his throat several times before he could find his voice. The rest of the year—perhaps longer!

"It doesn't make it too hard for you with your studies?"

"Oh, no'm. You see, I 'most get my lessons when I help Roy."

"But s'pose it means a fight like that every now and then?" put in Roy, teasingly.

"'Twon't. Foley's settled," answered Joe, seriously. "There ain't another chap in school, 'sides him, so mean he'd plague you."

"Then we'll consider it decided, shall we? And I won't interrupt your work any more."

Roy slapped Joe's shoulder. "Good for you. I'm glad, for one."

"Me, too," answered Joe. But besides this, he was counting up in the back of his head the number of weeks there would be before June 30. He would earn thirty whole dollars for Sis before school closed. And she had called his ugly bruises "Honorable scars!"

Joe went home on light heels that night. He would tell Sis first of all, he resolved. Wouldn't she be glad! She would be sure now of that wonderful vacation in the country she had been planning on for years. How she longed for it! And what a lot of good it would do her! How she would smile, too, at Joe's "honorable scars"!

But as he drew near the door, he heard loud voices in altercation. One was his father's; the other, Dick's.

"He's fourteen—he can get working-papers." This was Dick's voice.

Joe pricked up his ears. They were talking about *him*. And Dick was apparently urging his father to take Joe out of school and put him to work. A month ago, Joe would have rejoiced at escaping from school. Now—"After all my trying to make good at this job," thought Joe bitterly. "The way I've stayed in, evenin's—the way I've worked, studyin'. Just the very day I'm told it's sure! Well, he won't make much, doin' it. I'll act as Dick acted, and lose my jobs or I'll quit, the way Jack did. What's dad sayin'—"

"I know he's over fourteen, and can get workin'-papers, as well as you do," answered Mr. Darby, in gruff tones that told Joe absolutely nothing about his attitude in the matter.

"Then why don't you? We need the money bad enough. You didn't keep *me* wastin' my time in school, did you?" Dick was angry now, for his voice had a snarl in it.

"No," agreed his father. And again Joe could learn nothing from his tones. Yet if Joe remembered aright, Dick had been invited to leave school—by the school!

"Then why do you let him loaf when you wouldn't let me? Are you going to make him earn his keep, or aren't you? That's what I want to know! He's old enough!"

("Loaf!" thought Joe: when he worked till five

with Roy, and did his own school work all evening after dinner. Why, he hadn't been to the movies, or off with the gang, except on Saturdays, for a month—since he had been with Roy!)

Joe was listening anxiously for his father's answer, when Mary and Lizzie, his two small sisters, came running up the stairs behind him, and he had to open the door and go in. Joe glanced at Dick and his father. Dick looked just as his loud voice had foretold: angry, with a scowl on his face and a sullen glare in his eyes. Mr. Darby, smoking his pipe in fierce, short puffs, as he sat by the kitchen stove, met Joe's glance with one of his own—a measuring sort of look that sent Joe's heart down into his boots. “He *is* goin’ to put me to work! He never looked at me like that before!” thought poor Joe. And he waited for the command that would set at naught all his struggles for the past month.

But none came. Mr. Darby spoke no word to Joe; and Joe dared not broach the subject. Even uncertainty was better than knowing. Joe flung his books down—a good, thick pack—and started into Sis's room. He always greeted her the first thing when he came in; and to-day he had good news to tell her—no, he couldn't, till he knew about this new difficulty!

“Lemme see them books. What are ye studyin’?” asked Mr. Darby, suddenly.

Joe's hands grew cold. Never before had Mr.

Darby asked about, or cared about, Joe's school work, save in the periodical unpleasantnesses when he had had to sign Joe's report card. Joe undid the strap, and passed them to him with averted eyes, feeling that things were different—strangely, terribly different.

"Here. Wait," he bade, roughly, as Joe would have passed on to see Sis. "Tell me about 'em. I want to know what ye'r doin'."

Mr. Darby opened Joe's Latin book.

"That's Latin," explained Joe, timidly.

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Darby.

"It's a—a language," faltered Joe.

"Who speaks it?"

"Nobody now. They used to, once—" Joe's voice trailed off into silence.

"What good'll that do ye, then?" grunted Mr. Darby. "Howcome ye to take it?"

"Why—I dunno. All our class from elementary school took it, so's to be together."

"Read it in English," commanded Mr. Darby.

"I—I can't read that. We haven't got so far. We're only in Lesson 45 for to-morrow," faltered Joe.

"What an awful lot we know!" sneered Dick.

Mr. Darby picked up the next. "H'm. What's this?"

"M-my algebra book."

"What's them lines?"

Joe's heart fell as he saw his father had opened

the book at the very last chapter, where he knew the Seniors were studying.

"I dunno. That's what we learn when we're Seniors. We're on page 100 for to-day."

"Uh-huh!" grunted Mr. Darby, again, without bothering to look at page 100, Joe noticed. And "Humph! Smarty!" echoed Dick, from his corner.

"That's my Biology book," ventured Joe. Mr. Darby found some of Joe's drawings on loose sheets of paper and looked at them. Joe wished he'd been more careful—they were the very first drawings of the term, made in his old, careless way before he knew Roy; smudged with much erasure, and marked in the corner with a big red D—the lowest passing mark.

"Oh, see the pretty bug on the pretty flower," mocked Dick, as Mr. Darby turned a page of the chapter on Insects.

"That's the cabbage-butterfly, showing pollination—" began Joe, hopefully. Here was something he did know. But his father slapped the pages together, and handed all three books back to Joe without a word. Joe clumped away to Sis with rebellion in his heart.

He knew he had made a poor showing,—just at the time when he needed so badly to make a good one; but it hadn't been *his* fault; no, it hadn't! Did they expect him to know all Latin and all algebra, just because he'd studied them one term?

"Was I right?" whispered Sis, smiling.

"Eh? What about?" asked Joe, absently.

"Don't you remember? I said I was sure she'd speak to you to-day about engaging you for the rest of the year? Didn't she?"

"Much good it'll be," mumbled Joe.

Her astonished face hurt him. "Why? Oh, I know." Her voice sank to a whisper. "Dick?" she breathed as he bent his head.

"He's been talking to father about keeping you in school so long. As if *he* would have stayed in school if he'd been paid for it! But don't you worry," she laughed.

"What? Why?" demanded Joe, hoarsely.

"Wasn't I right about Roy's mother to-day? Then I'm right about this. Ask him."

"I'd never dare."

"Now, see here. Wasn't I right about to-day?" she repeated, insistently.

"Sure. But—"

"You'll find I'm right again," she said, wisely. Then, as Joe hesitated, somewhat impressed by her sureness, "Shall I ask him?" she suggested.

"Oh—*will* you?—no, I won't get behind a girl, either."

"Go ask right now!" she commanded.

So Joe went out into the kitchen again; and, though the fact that Sis was listening was the only thing that nerved him to do it, and though Dick was still there, muttering, Joe said,

“Went to Roy’s to-day. First time since the fight.”

Mr. Darby slowly removed his pipe from his mouth. “Supposed so,” he grunted.

Joe took a good grip on himself.

“And Mrs. Manners asked me to do it for the rest of the year.”

“M-m-m.”

“I said—” Joe was stuck fast.

“What?” helped Mr. Darby.

“I’d have to ask you first—about the whole year. I didn’t know—what you was intendin’—I should do—Mebbe you meant I should—go t’ work—There’ll be thirty weeks till the end of June—thirty dollars—for Sis—”

“Tell her *I’ve* no objections. It’s her affair if she wants to hire a numskull like you,” answered Mr. Darby. Then, as Joe looked up with a world of relief in his face, he chuckled: “So Dick here had ye worried, did he?”

CHAPTER IX

DIAMONDS, ROSES, AND SIS

“**A**REN'T my hands grubby? We've been tumbling around on those dusty mats in the gym this afternoon, and I'd hate to insult your bully cake and sandwiches, Norah,” asked Roy one day, as Norah set the inevitable tray on the table.

“A little soap and water wouldn't do 'em any harm, Master Roy,” answered Norah, candidly, as she started down the stairs.

“And yours must be in the same state, Joe,” added Roy.

“Worse,” said Joe, after a brief examination.

“The wash-bowl's right here,” said Roy.
“Come on.”

There was a short passageway between Roy's room and the front one, his mother's; a passage just long enough to accommodate a marble bowl. Towards this Roy led the way. “You first,” he bade, politely.

Joe pushed up his sleeves and turned the faucet; and then,

“My stars!” he exclaimed.

“What’s the matter? I should have warned you that on washday the water’s always extra hot. There’s some mysterious connection between them.”

But Joe was staring hard at something on the marble slab that supported the bowl.

On it were lying three of Mrs. Manners’ diamond rings. Even in that dark corner they sparkled with little flashes of light. Joe’s thoughts were tumbling over themselves in his brain.

“Lucky for her I’m not Dick! If I was Dick, I’d pocket them an’ say nothin’. But I’m *not* Dick—I couldn’t cheat Roy, an’ *her*, after they trusted me— But they’re worth a lot of money—enough to send Sis to the country all summer—”

“Your mother’s left her rings,” he blurted, hastily. He forced himself to speak, to save himself from a grim temptation that would thrust itself upon him, against his will—especially when he thought of Sis.

“She must have forgotten them when she washed her hands. Four of them, aren’t there?”

“Three—”

“No, four. There must be another. Look around.”

“There aren’t but three,” said Joe, looking wildly in the corner and on the carpet. It was almost as if he were being punished for his thoughts of a moment ago, by having them come

true and rise up against him. "It isn't fair," he thought in protest, "when I *didn't*. I thought of it, and didn't want to—and I *didn't*." But he realized that the very circumstances which had tempted him, now made such an accusation very possible.

But Roy went out into the hall and called down. Joe heard Mrs. Manners answer, and a moment later she appeared.

"I had put this one on, so I didn't notice, by the feeling, that the rest were missing," were the first words she said. Joe sighed with relief. The fourth one was accounted for; and, as he felt a great weight lifted, he realized how great that ugly fear had been.

"Joe discovered them," put in Roy.

Mrs. Manners gave him a grateful smile. "Do you like them, Joe?" she asked, seeing that he was staring at them.

"Yes'm. They're beauties. They must be worth a lot."

"That biggest one would pay Joe's salary for—how long did you say, mater?" asked Roy.

"About five years," she said, smiling at the way Roy put it.

"You're awful careless, ma," chided Roy.

"I'd trust Norah as I would myself; and Joe's the only other person that comes up here. So I *can* be careless," she answered.

Joe felt a hot flush mount to his cheek. He

hoped she wouldn't notice it. If she *knew*—if she only *knew*! Then he straightened up. He *had* fought that momentary temptation, and conquered it. He *did* deserve her trust.

Joe was glad Dick wasn't home; for he could go in and tell Sis the whole story. Poor little girl! She always drank in so eagerly every detail of the outside world that Joe brought in to her. None of the others seemed to care to talk to her much, but there was something about her helplessness that appealed to her big, rough, but soft-hearted brother. So now he had fallen into the habit of remembering things especially to tell her—funny things that occurred in school, or anything unusual that he saw. And her unconscious comments had helped Joe more than either of them dreamed.

Joe had tried once to imagine what her life was like, shut in by four walls—no, by the four corners of her bed. He could hardly put himself in her place; and when he had come to a dim realization of it, the thought oppressed him so that he tried to put it out of his mind as speedily as possible. "Poor, *poor* little Sis!" he thought. "If I don't tell her everything!" And from that time he had.

She knew by now every detail of how Roy looked, and Mrs. Manners, and even Norah; she could describe the Manners house, the hall, the stairway, and the room where the two boys studied, better than Joe himself.

Joe hadn't intended, however, to tell Sis about his temptation; but before he knew it, his tongue had led him too far to get out.

"And there they were. Why, I could have slipped them right into my pocket, easy as anything, and nobody been the wiser. And they were worth—hundreds of dollars!"

"But, oh, Joe, you didn't think of it, for a minute—*did* you? Did you *think* of it?" she implored.

Joe's eyes fell before her searching look. He never could lie to Sis. "Yes, I did for one second," he confessed, honestly, "when I thought—how much vacation they'd buy for you." A second later Joe was sorry he had said this. She clutched his arm in an agony of excitement.

"Oh, Joe! Don't you ever—*ever—ever!* You make me feel—oh, so bad!" She buried her face in her pillow, and Joe, trying to get close to hear what she said, slipped down on his knees beside the bed. "If you ever did such a thing, I wouldn't take it—I wouldn't—I wouldn't! Promise, Joe, you'll never—oh, think, if you were arrested and put in prison for stealing—a thief! Oh, Joe!"

"But, Sis, don't take on so," pleaded Joe. "*I didn't*. I'm only tellin' what I thought—for just a second. I just thought it—they didn't tempt me. You asked me—" Poor Joe was fairly frightened at the storm of tears and sobs he had aroused, and fearful lest it should make her ill.

"I'll promise anything you want me to, if it'll make you feel better—"

Sis slowly drew a quivering face from the pillow.

"You frightened me so! I know we're poor; but, Joe, there are worse things than being poor—worse things than my not going to the country."

She smiled a wan smile. "I do want you to promise—not to do wrong—ever—for *me*. Will you?"

"Yes, Sis, of course," responded Joe, earnestly.

"And that's a promise? An honest-to-goodness promise?"

Joe rose to his feet and stood very straight. Then he bent down and kissed her—a thing he rarely was betrayed into doing. "Yes, it is, Sis," he repeated.

"Then I'm happy again!" She smiled, and patted his hand.

Joe was not at all pleased to hear Dick's mocking laugh break in upon them. How long he had been listening, Joe could not guess. Sis drew back her hand like a shot, and Joe fled to the kitchen.

But unwittingly he had fled straight into Dick's presence. And Dick gave him a sneering grin which told Joe he had heard it all.

"You're a fine kind of a fool," commented Dick. "You an' your promise!" he sneered. "Well; I s'pose you think it's only to a sick kid, and a silly girl at that, so it doesn't make any difference. Wisht I'd had your chance to-day. Hundreds of

dollars' worth of diamonds, and a clear field. What a blame fool to let it go by. You *wanted* to do it," as Joe looked indignant. "'Twas only because you didn't have the nerve! Heard you say so, myself."

"I'm no thief," retorted Joe, with blazing eyes.

"Needn't try to look so goody-good. Came near it, seems to me! Lots of other folks are goody-goods because they don't *dare* do what they *want* to!"

"'Tain't stealin', anyway," persisted Dick, as Joe, determined on the wise policy of ignoring him, kept silent. "'Tain't takin' their bread an' butter. Diamonds are luxuries, an' they ain't no right to 'em. Things orter be evened up between the rich an' the poor. Rich folks have no *right* to more than they need. I *hate* rich folks. I'd like to blow them all up with dynamite!"

"Would you divide if *you* were rich? Would you hate yourself if you were rich?" asked Joe. He had only recently realized the foolishness of such argument, and he was impatient of it in others.

"Small chance of that!" answered Dick. Joe thought, to himself, that there surely was, if Dick kept on doing nothing as he had for the past two years. "All their money ought to be divided equally among everybody. The workers earn it for them to get rich on."

Dick's talk made Joe feel uncomfortable: as if

he were somehow a traitor to those who employed him, even in standing by and letting Dick abuse them without defending them, or at least showing his own attitude.

"I've read we'd all get about four cents apiece if they did that," laughed Joe, glad he had happened to remember that statement. "If you had a hundred dollars, would *you* give up ninety-nine dollars and ninety-six cents of it?"

"Bah!" snarled Dick, who for once had no answer ready. Just then Mrs. Darby came home from market, and their talk was interrupted; much to Joe's satisfaction.

Dick lounged about, however, with malice in his eye. Joe wondered what meanness he was planning. When Dick looked like that, Joe had learned from experience, he was almost always planning to get Joe into trouble.

Presently Mr. Darby came home. He went in to greet Sis for a moment, as he generally did. When he came out he was angry,—angrier than Joe had seen him for a long time.

"Who's been makin' Sis cry?" he demanded. "Never can get it out o' *her*." Joe saw Dick's face light up with malicious joy, and, in a flash, he understood his mean scheme. "Have you been teasin' her, Dick?" For sometimes Dick amused himself by deliberately annoying her to the state of tears. "If you have, I'll make you sorry for it!"

“What are you always pickin’ on *me* for,” protested Dick. “Joe made her cry. I heard him.”

“Joe?” repeated Mr. Darby in surprise; for Joe’s fondness for Sis was a by-word in the family. He had never been known to tease her.

But Joe was standing with a red face, embarrassed and confused. Wasn’t it *mean* of Dick to put it that way—when he knew Joe couldn’t and wouldn’t explain?

“You see!” prompted Dick, nodding at Joe; who indeed looked the picture of guilt.

Now, teasing Sis was one of the few things that Mr. Darby was insistent about; and who could blame him? He turned to Joe, and saw his red, troubled face. “Did you make Sis cry?” he asked, with significant emphasis, which Joe understood perfectly.

“Yes, sir,” answered Joe, slowly. What else could he say?

Mr. Darby opened his mouth in astonishment. Then he made straight for Joe, seized him by the collar, and dealt him a staggering buffet on the side of the head. Joe caught himself against the wall, winked and shook his head, and stood perfectly still. He knew from past experience that to dodge, or struggle, or even put up a shielding arm, only meant more blows. In silence he took two more, delivered with all the strength of those brawny muscles.

“Now get out o’ here. Go sit in the front room.

No dinner for *you*, to-night," growled Mr. Darby, when he was through. He was puzzled and vexed at Joe's unusual silence and meekness, as well as astounded and disappointed that Joe had begun to torment Sis—something which he had thought impossible.

Joe turned in the doorway. He met Dick's triumphant leer; saw his mother in her old, familiar attitude—her eyes hidden in her apron; saw his father, still scowling at him, savagely. Yes, he *had* to risk it. His books were on the window-sill, beyond where his father was sitting.

"May I have my books?" he asked, in a low voice.

"No!" said Mr. Darby, with an oath. "Git! Don't ye speak to Sis, neither."

Joe turned without a word. He had to pass through her room. They couldn't speak, but she reached out a thin hand and touched his as he went by. Bitterly, he thought—he had hurt her *again!*

He dropped into a chair, and leaned his aching head on his hand. That Dick! Dick was surely a bad one: always trying to get him into trouble; always talking about "World Brotherhood," and being mean as dirt to his own brother; always talking about "capital grinding down labor," when he had never done an honest day's work in his life; always talking about his "rights" and trampling over the rights of better—or weaker—people than he—even poor little Sis.

And what about poor little Sis? It seemed to Joe as if every time *he* was bad, or weak, or even foolish—Sis had to suffer for it. 'Twasn't fair, to poor little Sis.

Then a tremendous thought came to Joe. If this were true, then if *he*—Joe—*stopped* being bad, or weak, or foolish, then Sis *wouldn't* have to suffer for it! All to-day's trouble had come from his momentary temptation with the diamonds. If he'd only been strong! Joe resolved on an experiment: he would try to do just as he ought, for *her* sake.

Mrs. Darby came in with her supper. She cast a look at the lonely figure hunched up by the window in the next room.

"Joe," she whispered, "here's a roll I brought in on Sis's tray." She tiptoed in and laid it down beside Joe, who bit into it eagerly. Since he was being punished for nothing, he argued, it was only fair to elude it if he could. Forgotten was his resolution of a moment ago. But he was reminded of it.

Mr. Darby, still puzzled, and thinking he might have been mistaken about Joe—as well as realizing that he was interfering with Joe's means of earning money—chanced to come in at this identical moment, bringing Joe's books. There was the half-eaten roll in Joe's hand, and Joe lamely chewing as well as he could with his sore jaw.

Mr. Darby threw the books to the floor and knocked the roll out of Joe's hand. "Wha'd I say about eatin'!" he exploded. "I'll teach ye!"

Not three, but six cuffs were Joe's portion this time. Like most arbitrary people, defiance was one of the things John Darby could not endure. Joe clenched his hands together, and resolved, for Sis' sake, not to make a sound. But he knew that Sis, in the next room, could hear the sound of Mr. Darby's fist, and that at every blow she was wincing worse than Joe.

"Don't—do it here—Sis—" he gasped in a whisper, as, looking up imploringly, he met his father's eyes.

"I was bringin' ye y'r books," said Mr. Darby, puzzled again, and letting go of Joe. "But ye'll do no studyin' to-night, I'm thinkin'."

Left to himself again, Joe did some thinking. That was the way to do, wasn't it! he thought disgustedly: make a resolution and break it the very next minute! Didn't he know he shouldn't have taken that roll? And again Sis had paid for it worse than he.

And he wasn't to be allowed to study that night. When could he get his lessons? He *needed* those lessons, to help Roy in study-period the first thing next day. Well, if they couldn't let him do his work, he *wouldn't* do it! He wouldn't go to Roy's, the next day, either. Of course, he *could* get up

early the next morning—before five, when his father got up—and study then; but he'd be hanged if he would—

Joe caught himself up. What was he planning! Hadn't he seen enough of not doing as he should. Hadn't he, that very evening, because it somehow came back on Sis, made up his mind to do as he ought? Hadn't he broken that resolution within ten minutes; and *hadn't* it hurt Sis more? What would happen if he carried out his first mad plan? *No!* He *would* get up early, and study, and go to Roy's; avoid Dick, and win back his father's approval. Somehow he had begun to care about this last more than merely to avoid punishment. Those two times when Mr. Darby's eyes had twinkled into Joe's, and they had spoken in perfect mutual understanding, were strangely precious to the boy. Joe was so sorry, though, that his father thought he would torment Sis. How could he persuade him to the contrary?

Everything went well the next morning. His mother remembered to wake him; his father made no mention of last night's events; his studying went like magic; and Roy met Joe with a rose in his button-hole which he insisted in Joe's taking. Joe took extra good care of it, planning to take it to Sis. *She'd* never seen a rose like that in all her life, Joe knew.

But when he entered Roy's room that afternoon —“My stars!” exclaimed Joe.

For on table, mantel, and bureau were vases of flowers—roses and carnations, set off by huge fern-leaves. Their beauty made the room look as if ready for a fête, and filled it with perfume.

“Aren’t they—sweet-smelling!” Joe was going to say pretty; but of late the habit had become fixed upon him, to put himself in Roy’s place before he spoke, and to try not to speak of how things looked.

“Yes, aren’t they? Mother gave a dinner last night to some old school friends visiting the city,” explained Roy. “Say; wonder if you and I will ever be givin’ each other dinners! Mater always brings the flowers up here afterward, so I can enjoy them,” Roy buried his nose in an American Beauty, and Joe was glad he had remembered. “Then she sends them to the hospital.”

A rebellious envy made Joe almost sorry he had been thoughtful of Roy’s feelings. Wouldn’t Sis like to look at just one of those beautiful flowers! And these rich folks were going to bundle them off to people they didn’t know, like old clothes! Perhaps Dick *was* right about rich folks, after all.

Joe hated that lesson; for all the time these thoughts kept turning in the back of his head. He couldn’t get away from the flowers by resolving not to look at them; for their odor permeated the room. And he thought it quite unbearable that the new vocabulary should include *rosa*, a rose, *viola*, a violet, and *flos*, *floris*, flower.

Mrs. Manners herself brought their apples and cake; looking particularly rich and high-bred, in some sort of a filmy blue dress. At that moment Joe almost hated her.

"Will it disturb you if Norah comes up for the flowers while you study?" she asked. "Why, Joe; don't you suppose your mother would like a bunch of these roses?"

Joe blushed—first with embarrassment, then with shame at his secret thoughts. He was so confused that he blurted out, earnestly, "Oh—Sis would—" before he thought. Wild horses couldn't hitherto have made him talk about Sis to these folks. It would have been too much like begging charity.

"Is Sis your sister?" asked Roy. Knowing Joe better than did Mrs. Manners, something in Joe's voice made Roy curious.

"Yes," answered Joe, visibly shutting up within himself like a clam.

"Maybe she's going out somewhere soon, and would like to wear them. They ought to keep for several days," continued Mrs. Manners in her gentle way.

"She doesn't go out," Joe found himself saying; because he had to say something.

"Doesn't go out! Is she an invalid?" asked Roy's mother, with real interest. So sincere was her voice, that Joe explained.

"I should say she *shall* have some!" exclaimed

Mrs. Manners. "I was going to send them to the crippled children in the hospital. Now this is much better, isn't it—to some one we feel as though we knew. What do you think she'd like best, Joe? I'll have Norah put them in one of the boxes they came in, while you're working."

When Joe went home that night he was staggering under two big, awkward florist's boxes. But the evil thoughts that he had staggered under were wholly wiped out. No longer did he, like Dick, hate rich people because they were rich; and how could he say they were heartless? So his heart was as light as his heels.

And Sis? It isn't hard to guess how Sis felt and acted: how she laughed and cried, in succession, and then tried to do both at once; and how she hugged the flowers, thorns and all. Then Mr. Darby came home; and this time he didn't object to Joe's making Sis cry. Instead, he looked at everybody, wearing a big rose, and said,

"Hey, Joe; everybody's got a rose but me. Don't I get one?"

Joe, taking the biggest rose from his own buttonhole, and putting it, with awkward fingers, into his father's, felt that peace was declared again, and that his father had guessed about Joe's teasing Sis.

CHAPTER X

THRILLERS

“WE’RE not going to study this afternoon,” said Roy one day, after luncheon was eaten. “You won’t mind reading a story instead?” he asked, taking down a book from the shelf with the sure fingers that Joe had not yet ceased to marvel at.

“Should say not,” replied Joe. He happened to be tired of study that day—having worked extra hard at it—and this came just at the right time for him; though he supposed it would be one of the stupid kind of stories that grown-up folks wanted you to read.

But its name was *Treasure Island*—a proper name for a boy’s book, Joe thought. He had wondered what kind of books Roy read, since he was dependent largely upon his mother to read to him. This was all about pirates, and treasure on an island, and fights with the pirates to get the treasure. And its hero was a boy no older than Joe—though Joe was disappointed that he didn’t become commander of the expedition, as did the heroes of *his* favorite tales. Roy and Joe had just got worked up to a tense state of excitement

as to his fate, when Joe heard Mrs. Manners coming. He stopped, and whipped the book under his chair.

"What's the matter?" asked Roy, surprised at his stopping.

"Sh! I've chucked it out of sight," whispered Joe.

Roy laughed outright. "It was mother that gave it to me, last birthday," he said.

Now Joe liked to read; though books were scarce in the Darby family, and none of them ever ventured inside a public library. So Joe had to depend on the dog's-eared, tattered paper volumes that the other boys lent him. To Joe, all the books in the world fell into two classes: the stupid kind he waded through at school, which grown-ups thought you ought to read; and the thrilling kind he devoured out of sight in the corner at home. He had never even bothered to wonder why the stupid kind were praised and studied, and the interesting ones frowned at and forbidden. It was all a part of the big puzzle that grown-ups made of the world.

Roy and Mrs. Manners were both delighted to find that Joe read so well. Now Joe was thankful for the long hours he had spent at Sis's bedside, reading to her. This task had somehow fallen upon him: Dick and Jack never would do it; but Joe had felt his responsibility as he grew older, and had responded loyally. He had never been

sorry he did it, though it would sometimes mean missing some fun with "the fellers." Now it was "coming back to him" in increased skill just when and where he would have chosen to have it. The world wasn't always so unfair, thought Joe, cheerfully.

Since Roy liked real thrillers of stories, and since his mother let him read them, Joe thought he would take him up his own favorite to read to him; though he didn't know as even that gorgeous tale was *quite* as good as Roy's story. Roy certainly had the luck in finding it, that time! Of course, Mrs. Manners' choosing it was just an accident. She couldn't possibly have known it was such a dandy book for boys. If she had, she probably wouldn't have bought it. For Joe was used to having all the tales he most enjoyed frowned upon and labeled "trash."

So Joe took up his pet yellow-back, *Dauntless Dermot, the Boy Lieutenant*, and they began reading it. But presently Roy began to fidget, and, in the middle of the most exciting part, Joe caught him yawning surreptitiously.

"Shall I go on?" asked Joe, tactfully, at the end of that chapter.

"No-o; not to-day, I guess," answered Roy. "Honest, Joe, *don't* you think it's rather steep to have a boy of our age as one of the instructors at Annapolis?"

"Why,—I dunno," answered Joe, in surprise.

How sharp Roy *was*! *He* wouldn't have thought of that, if he'd read the book a hundred times! And here Roy nailed it at the very first time! Nor he would hardly have dared criticise, in that fashion, what any one had written in a real printed book! Of course anything in print had to be so.

"You go to Annapolis after the High School. Can you imagine a boy of our age teaching in *our* school? And that's lower grade than Annapolis."

Joe looked at Roy in wonderment. How he did think things out!

"And isn't it still steeper," went on Roy, "to have him the commander of a United States submarine? Just think of the men's lives depending on his judgment. Just think of the mere money value of a submarine. Why I was reading the other day that one costs about eight hundred thousand dollars. And, then, just think of all he'd have to know. How could he even learn it all in ten years, supposing he started school at six! There's algebra, and geometry, and trigonometry, geography, navigation, nautical astronomy—"

"Ye-es; maybe you're right," admitted Joe.

"And then, can you imagine a boy of sixteen licking eight full-grown mutineers, single-handed?"

"If he was extra smart," protested Joe, with a feeling that he must defend his pet hero, on a point where *he*, and not Roy, certainly had most authority.

"Suppose there had been eight Foleys instead of one for you to lick? And Foley was a boy, and they were men."

"But *I'm* not extra smart. I'm not commander of a submarine, remember!" retorted Joe.

Roy smiled. "You still believe he could do it!" he declared; then he thought intently for a moment. Both boys enjoyed these impromptu discussions they often had, about everything under the sun. For neither ever lost his temper; Roy's mind was very keen; and Joe, though slower, was also slower to be convinced.

"Did you ever—er—have a difference with your father?" asked Roy, laughing.

"Sure," grinned Joe.

"Can you fancy yourself—or even Dauntless Dermot—licking *him*, supposing he was a mutineer—let alone seven more with him?"

"No-o, not quite!" confessed Joe, honestly. "But I'd have a pistol if I was an officer. That would quell 'em!"

"Dauntless Dermot didn't."

"No, so he didn't."

"And the eight mutineers *did*!"

"Ye-es."

"And, remember, it meant death to the mutineers if they didn't win, and death to Dauntless Dermot if *he* didn't."

"Well, that was one way that odds were even,"

laughed Joe, giving in gracefully. And the discussion ended in a hearty laugh.

Some days later Joe dipped into *The Boy Lieutenant* again; and caught himself yawning just like Roy at Dauntless Dermitt's wonderful achievements. He was surprised, then pleased. On the whole, he felt rather proud of himself for that yawn. All the time he was reading, he discovered impossibilities—impossibilities of situation, of action, even of language! Joe flung *Dauntless Dermitt*, *The Boy Lieutenant* into a far corner, with disgust. He was sick of his very name.

"Wish there were more books like those of yours," he said to Roy, the next time they read together. There were only a few pages left, now, before *Treasure Island* came to an end.

"There are—three hundred of 'em," answered Roy, promptly. "If you'll look in that top desk drawer, you'll see the list. It's from Boy Scout Headquarters, and every book is a peach! I'm going to read right straight through that list—with your help, of course."

"But where will you get 'em all?" asked Joe. Three hundred books—like *Treasure Island*!

"Own some—public library—school library."

"Roy Manners! You're never chump enough to believe the *school library* has *story-books* in it!" exclaimed Joe.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. I'll prove it to you to-morrow at school."

"Prove it if you can," challenged Joe.

Needless to say, he did. Joe was astounded at the rows and rows of *stories*—yes, sir, *stories*! Roy could scarcely get him to move on. And the friendliness of the librarian was another surprising thing. To Joe, a librarian was a person whose business it was to keep people from using the books in a library by scaring them out of it. She fairly hovered about in their vicinity; it was on Roy's account, thought Joe. As if *he* couldn't help him all he needed!

"Have you got any books—such as a girl that's a cripple could read?" Joe asked the librarian, as she approached and asked for a second time if she could help him in any way. She appeared so anxious to be doing something useful, that Joe magnanimously asked her a question. Of course he didn't know, but Miss Scott had been talking to her recently about him; and Joe Darby was one of the "big game" that the little librarian hoped to lure into the library, by and by. Miss Scott had even plotted with her, to send him in here on an errand.

"Have you a sister like that?" she asked with great interest. "How old is she?" Then she took pains to bring Joe three or four books, gave him a list of some others, and asked him which he would take to-day. So Joe took one; and maybe

Sis didn't receive it with all sorts of raptures. Joe read it to her after her eyes tired, and was surprised that even a girls' book should be somewhat interesting. If the librarian's *girls'* books could interest Joe, what would her boys' books be like? It didn't take Joe many days to find out!

But the best was still in the unguessed future.

"What's the best book for boys that ever was written?" demanded Roy one day, with a mysterious smile.

"Give it up," answered Joe. "Know you're dying to tell me."

"This!"

Roy slapped down on the table a well-worn paper-covered volume, with a picture on it of a boy waving a flag in each hand.

Joe picked it up with curiosity. "*Boy Scouts of America. Handbook for Boys,*" he read.

If he hadn't known Roy was a Scout, he wouldn't have touched it. Joe Darby hadn't any use for Scouts. Once, when they were just starting a troop among the 2A boys in school, and he had seen their uniforms, Joe had hung about their meeting-place, hopefully. But nobody invited him to join—*him*, big Joe Darby, the leader of his gang! If they didn't want *him*, they couldn't be much. And he had been loud in his scorn of them ever since.

Of course Joe had no way of knowing the inside history of that Scout troop: how the Scoutmaster

had actually had Joe's name on his original list of prospective Scouts; how the mere numbers of that list had made him tear his hair at the impossibility of taking in all the boys that he wanted in; how he had, most reluctantly, been compelled to limit his troop to boys in his own grade and in his own classes; and how he was, even now, trying to persuade one of the other teachers to start a troop with the boys left out—among them, Joe!

More to please Roy than anything else—though he did have a curiosity that he wouldn't acknowledge even to himself—Joe turned the pages at random. He saw a page-full of pictures of wild animals—he didn't know the names of all of them. He saw two or three pages of illustrations of knots—he couldn't have tied one! Then he found an article—an *understandable* article—on wireless telegraphy and one on games—why, that book was chock-full of the very things a boy wanted to read!

"I'm going to loan it to you," went on Roy. "Know it myself by heart, just about. I had it out reviewin'—our Troop is getting ready for its annual exhibition at the Lighthouse. Say—I want you to put down the date, and remember you're comin'. Give you your ticket just as soon as we get 'em ourselves. But don't forget to ask me for the *Handbook*, after the show's over. I need it myself till then, or I'd let you take it to-day."

CHAPTER XI

AN EXHIBITION

IN due time Roy's tickets came, and Joe's was delivered to him. There came a printed announcement with it, giving a hint of the program that was coming. Joe nearly wore both out, carrying them about in his pocket and looking at them so frequently.

He had always wondered why in the world a place for the blind should be called *The Lighthouse*. It seemed to him a peculiarly inappropriate name. Now an eloquent little seal in the center told him. It bore a picture of a lighthouse shining amid storm-darkened sea and rocks; and round it went the inscription,

“LIGHT THROUGH WORK.”

All of a sudden Joe understood. Once he had wondered why Roy wanted to go to an ordinary public school, and learn all the things that everybody learned; in fact, why should he want to go at all? Now Joe pictured what life would be like to Roy *without* something to do. “Light Through Work!” How well that expressed it! And,

thought Joe, maybe other folks got "Light through work," too, only it was just a different kind of light.

Joe confessed to a thrill that Saturday morning that the most exciting movie had hitherto failed to elicit from him. The announcement had promised a play, which he had stringent orders from Sis to report in strict detail; but what interested Joe was the promised "Exhibition of scoutcraft—knot-tying, and gymnastics—ground-tumbling and pyramid-building."

Joe presented himself early at the quiet-looking building on 59th Street, and lingered a moment to look at the large show-window filled with articles made by the blind. Going inside the door, he found himself in a hallway already thronged. In one corner was a group of Scouts in uniform, gathered around their Scoutmaster. He didn't see Roy there; but these were younger boys than Roy, and Joe remembered that Roy was in the athletic stunts, and was probably getting on his gym suit. Joe went into the auditorium, where he found a big green curtain to watch, as it wiggled tantalizingly with people behind it getting ready.

The entertainment began with music—piano pieces and songs by blind students. Joe opened his eyes. How well they played! There was one "cunning little fatty"—so Joe named her!—who was led to the piano and lifted onto the stool, whom Joe resolved to remember to tell Sis about: she

played her simple little piece so earnestly—she stopped and started over again from the beginning conscientiously, every time she made a mistake—and took the applause of the audience with such glee.

The play followed the music. Joe leaned back to be bored. The curtain went up on a toy-shop, with life-sized dolls of all descriptions scattered about, and an old toy-maker carefully sewing up one who was losing her sawdust. Presently the toy-maker fell asleep; then a fairy came—a light-footed, dainty little girl that one couldn't conceive of as not seeing—and the toys came alive, and talked. Joe would have scorned it as a "silly girls' play," except that he was seeing it through Sis's eyes, knowing that she would demand a description of how every single doll looked and acted.

Then the curtain fell. The next stunt was the Scouts.

In they marched, with a steady tramp. You couldn't tell they were blind, except that each lad rested his hands lightly on the preceding boy's hips. They mounted the steps with secure tread, and lined up across the platform. A supply of rope was passed down the line, as quickly as sighted boys could have done it.

"Square knot—tie! Quick!" commanded the Scoutmaster, who stood facing them down in front of the platform. Joe was surprised at their dex-

terity, as one after another made the knot and held it out for inspection.

"Untie. Square knot—behind your back. Tie! Quick!" This took longer, and a few boys squirmed in their eagerness, as Joe knew he would have done. He resolved to try that stunt himself—after Roy had shown him that knot. But one by one the knots were finished, and again held up.

In the same manner they went down a list of more knots than Joe knew existed. What in the world, for example, was a "sheepshank," a "clove-hitch," or a "bowline"? Yet Joe counted nine different kinds of knots that they tied. When they needed something to tie around—to represent the "timber" in the "timber-hitch," each took the arm of the boy to his right.

Then the smaller Scouts marched out. The curtain was pulled together again, and presently went up on a scene that looked like a gymnasium. There were pairs of dumb-bells ranged along the rear of the stage; the floor was covered with mats; and a horse and parallel bars stood at one side to be at hand when needed.

In came the larger Scouts, in gymnasium suits. Well set-up and muscular they looked; in this respect they would have compared favorably with any group of lads of their age.

A dumb-bell drill aroused Joe's anticipation as to what was to follow. Quickly, steadily, rhythmically, the dumb-bells flashed back and forth,

up and down, or crashed together with well-sent force. "They beat our gym class in school," thought Joe, "and Roy's the best one here, too!"

The stunts they did with the horse and parallel bars made Joe's eyes open wide. One after another they leaped the horse—forwards, sidewise, then once round again, to turn a somersault over it. Now came the parallel bars—not only all the things they did in school, but many more, and harder ones. You had to make yourself remember that these agile gymnasts were doing it without seeing!

Now the apparatus was moved back, and the floor left clear of all but the mats. Once more the Scouts lined up at one side, their faces aglow with enjoyment. Then one at a time, they turned a somersault—first a forward, then a backward, then a forward followed by a backward. They ended this part of the program with a "giant-roll."

"What next?" thought Joe, now speechless with admiration.

They had saved the best for the climax—pyramid building. Joe never took his eyes off as, in succession, eight of them formed a "grand pyramid"; then ten united in a "shoulder pyramid"; then a hip pyramid—a fellow's hips made pretty slippery standing-ground, thought Joe; yet they stood, three at the base, then two, then the smallest lad atop of that! As if that were not high enough,

the next pyramid was four deep—four at the base, then three, then two, then one. They held it—then presto, everybody let go at once, and they fell into a flat heap, with ten glowing faces lifted up turtle-like, and grinning at the audience.

That was the end. There was appreciative applause, in which Joe was as loud as any one else there. Performers and audience mingled in one gayly chattering mass.

“It was great!” said Joe to Roy, as they soon found each other.

“You wait here till I get dressed, and I’ll take you all over the place,” promised Roy. “You’ve never been here before, have you?”

So Joe and Roy were soon strolling about on a tour of inspection. They went up the elevator into the salesroom, where Joe marveled at the braided and woven mats, the pottery, and the baskets, all made by fingers that had no help of eyes. There were brooms, too, and carpet-beaters; cookies and cakes; and some beautifully joined footstools and tables, made by a blind cabinet-maker. It took all Joe’s experience with Roy and his credulity, combined, to believe that these last could be made without sight. He knew *he* couldn’t have done it, even with the use of his eyes. They visited the workshop, the bowling-alleys, the offices with their blind stenographers ticking away at their machines; the library, with its bulky volumes in Braille and other raised type; and last the

“Squirrel-Cage”—a smooth-floored roof-garden, where Roy told enthusiastically of many good times roller-skating.

When Joe went home, he took with him a copy of the *Lighthouse Log*, in which Sis could read all about these things which he had seen.

Sis kept the *Lighthouse Log* within reach for all the next month. Joe had looked it over, and found it interesting; but he couldn't see what there was about it that made Sis never let it out of her sight.

“Don't you put that out of my reach,” warned Sis one day, as Joe, coming home from school, shoved the books and papers from the chair by her bedside so he could sit down.

“What in the world do you find in that that's so interesting? I should think something more cheerful—or a story—”

Sis took Joe's big hand and nestled down with her cheek on it.

“Joe, I keep it there to remind me—”

“What of?” asked Joe softly, as she paused.

“Sometimes, when I feel—oh, tired and cross, as I do sometimes, you know,” (Joe knew Sis meant when the pain was worse than usual, and she was weary of lying in bed, a helpless cripple), “I just look at it, and it reminds me—that I'm better off than lots of folks. Why, I can *see* ma, and dad, and you, and all the rest. I can read, all I want to, and sew, and—look at roses,” she put in

slyly. "I tried it once, you know—not the roses, but the—other."

"Tried what?"

"Shutting my eyes, and keeping them shut. And then I thought, what if I had to always be like that. Oh, Joe, I'm *so* glad you brought it!"

"Poor little Sis!" whispered Joe. He was glad it was twilight, and she couldn't see him.

"No! *Not* poor little Sis," she corrected, firmly.

It was Joe that broke the silence that fell upon them for a moment after.

"I brought you some more funny answers to-day," said Joe. "We had a test in Biology last Friday, and to-day we got back our papers. Miss Summit always reads us the silliest answers, and I wrote 'em down for you."

"Did you pass?" inquired Sis.

"Sure. Seventy."

"Good! But you make it eighty next time. Go ahead."

"Here's one:" Joe produced a paper from his pocket. "'Saliva you need in the stomach, and if enough isn't there you get a pain,'" read Joe.

Sis giggled. "I guess *that* boy had had experience," she commented.

"'The object of digestion,'" continued Joe, "'is so that more things can be eaten. If we did not digest our food, there would soon be no room for more.'"

"*That* boy—" began Sis, with the merry eyes that Joe loved to see twinkling at him. But Joe caught her up.

"How do you know it's a boy?" he demanded.

"Because!" she retorted. "Now, wasn't it?"

"Maybe. Here's one, by a *girl*!" he said with emphasis. "'Insects have a relation to agriculture. When an insect eats something on some agricultural crop it eats it and in that way protects the agriculture. They also eat some of the things that is planted and this way destroys the plants.' If you can tell who eats what, you're smart, that's all. And here's another *girl*:

"'The human body is studied in a zoölogy course because there are still some uncivilized people who act like animals.'"

"She's perfectly right!" defended Sis promptly. "I think the boys' answers are *much* sillier than the girls'."

"That's what Miss Summit said," confessed Joe. "Here's the last one. You've got to guess who wrote it, a boy or a girl."

"If it's awful silly 'twas a boy," retorted Sis.

"'Values of health: We can eat without taking medicines; no nasty medicines to be taken or paid for when healthy; if you have good health you can eat well.'"

"Boy!" cried Sis, laughing.

"No, sir; girl!" Joe himself laughed at having caught her; and Sis giggled hilariously at having

been caught. They were making so much noise that they didn't hear some one enter.

"Hey, Joe," came Mr. Darby's voice from the doorway, as he surveyed them. "Caught you teasin' Sis again, have I?"

Joe laughed shamefacedly—blushed—and sidled away. He hated to have any one catch him when he was with Sis. But this time he was glad, because he knew now that a certain point was settled in his father's mind—about teasing Sis.

CHAPTER XII

THE BEST BOOK OF ALL

AFTER that exhibition, wild horses couldn't have kept Joe away from the *Handbook*—that book that told you all about Scouts and how to become one. Nor could any shyness have kept him from reminding Roy about it, when Roy happened to forget to give it to Joe, as he had agreed.

"Sorry I forgot. Glad you had sense enough to remind me. Keep it as long as you like. So you're really interested in Scouts?"

"You bet," answered Joe, slipping it into his pocket. Then he forgot about it in the business of the next three hours.

When he opened the door of the Darby flat, the first thing that greeted him was a bedlam of noise. Both the baby and five-year-old Johnny were yelling at the top of their lungs; the two little girls were quarreling in sharp, shrill voices; and Mrs. Darby was scolding everybody in general as she tried to mop up the baby's broken bottle of milk with one hand, and to rescue a frying-pan of burning onions with the other.

Joe scowled. He couldn't help contrasting the noisy, crowded, onion-scented room with the quiet,

orderly ones he had just come from. Just then he felt that he hated to come back to its noise and confusion, after his afternoons with Roy.

"Stop yer yellin', Johnny," he growled at the small boy who stood directly in his way. Joe shoved him roughly aside, and slapped his hands for crying—with the immediate result of making him roar twice as loud as before. Joe's deep frown deepened.

"What you two always jawin' about?" he growled to the girls. Then he pushed past them, pulling a braid of one and pinching the neck of the other.

As he stamped into the next room, he heard his mother's querulous voice:

"Joe, will you run round to the store and get a can of peaches and a pint o' milk f'r th' baby?" But Joe pretended not to have heard, and went on.

He had hoped for a quiet talk with Sis, to make him feel better. He felt cross and out of sorts. The world was against him. Why couldn't *he* have had the money and the home Roy had! 'Twasn't fair! Dick was right in his grumbling. But he'd talk it over with Sis—then he suddenly realized he couldn't. He couldn't tell her all his thoughts and feelings; and she'd worry if he did. A great chap he was, to worry a girl—a sick girl—with his fool troubles!

Sis was asleep; so he threw himself into a chair by the window. As he did so, the book in his

pocket made its presence known by bumping against the chair. He pulled it out. He'd have a few minutes before dinner; he could at least find the page where it told what you had to do to be a Scout.

He found it. The book seemed to open naturally to a page where Joe saw, standing out in heavy type, the titles:

The Scout Oath.

The Scout Salute.

The Scout Handshake.

He read the short paragraphs hastily; tried doing the Sign and the Salute. Then at the bottom of the page came

The Scout Law.

After he turned the leaf, he began to read more slowly. In a new paragraph he read:

"The following laws relate to the Boy Scouts of America. These laws a boy promises to obey when he takes his Scout oath:

"1. A Scout is trustworthy. . . ." He read, and fidgeted uneasily. He thought of that moment when the diamonds winked at him from the wash-bowl. "I didn't! No, I didn't!" he thought uncomfortably. "I could live up to that. I only fib when I want to. What's the next?"

"2. A Scout is loyal. . . . He is loyal to . . . *his home, his parents!*" What had he been think-

ing not two minutes ago—that he *hated* his home! And his parents that fed and clothed and sheltered him! He had been comparing that home with another, and envying the other boy.

“3. A Scout is—helpful!” Yes, he’d surely been helpful when he pretended not to hear his mother when she asked him to help her—when she was so busy! And he’d been courteous, too!

“6. A Scout is kind,” were the words that mocked at him on the next line. Yes; it was surely kind to slap your baby brother and tease your younger sisters!

“7. A Scout is obedient”—yes, he’d been obedient to his mother, hadn’t he?

“8. A Scout is cheerful”—no, he didn’t feel particularly cheerful just then. Nor was it a cheerful face that glowered back at him from the parlor mirror. He read that paragraph twice because it hit him so hard. “‘He smiles whenever he can. His obedience to orders is prompt and cheery. He never shirks nor grumbles at hardships.’”

Well, there were only four more. They couldn’t hit him any harder than these had. Even now, Joe felt as though Foley had been battering him all over. But Foley had never made him feel like that, inside!

“9. A Scout is thrifty,” made him feel better. Maybe there was a ray of hope. He read on. “He works faithfully . . . saves his money so

that he may be generous to those in need—" Sis! Why, here was one law he was *keeping*!

"10. A Scout is brave." Why—he thought he was brave. Hadn't he faced Foley? He had faced Foley "in spite of fear"; he had stood up for Roy "against the coaxings of friends and the jeers of enemies." "Defeat does not down him—" Well, he'd been pretty well downed by the first eight laws. But, jiminy, he *wouldn't* be downed. He'd keep those laws—or bust! That is, of course, if he really started in on them. He wasn't sure yet, that he would. It looked like a lot of trouble, when you could succeed in breaking eight of them in the space of just two minutes! The last two laws also made him feel better; he knew he had kept them fairly well.

Joe resolved on an experiment. He'd try, and see if those old laws would get the better of him! How should he begin? Not by sitting there, loafing, when he was needed in the kitchen. He rose with a frown—saw himself in the mirror. "Oh, land! A Scout is cheerful!" he muttered under his breath.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" he asked, as he entered the kitchen.

Joe had to blush at the look of astonishment and incredulity that his mother gave him.

"I asked you to go to the store, but Lizzie's gone now," she said, in a tired, dragged-out voice that made Joe uncomfortable.

"Did you?" asked Joe, in surprised accents. (Bang! *Trustworthy* knocked to smithereens! thought Joe.)

"If you really want to do something to help you could take the baby up, and see if that'll quiet him. But I don't suppose you'll want to do that," she added, hopelessly.

"Old *Cheerful's* got it this time," thought Joe. Of all things, holding the baby was a task that he detested most. Dick would come in in a moment, and call him "nurse-girl," and "Josephine"; and his father would laugh at him, too. Well? What if they did?

"I'll bust your nose, old *Cheerful*, before you'll down me," he promised. So he took up the red-faced, wrinkled Sammy with a cheerful countenance.

Joe unconsciously handled the baby with a gentle, easy touch he had learned in being with Roy. The baby stopped crying out of sheer surprise. Joe then made some of his famous faces, and soon Johnny was laughing almost as loudly as he had been crying.

The look of relief his mother gave him made Joe feel good. He was being *helpful*—yes, and *loyal* and *kind* and *obedient* and *cheerful*, all at once! Why, it was as easy, once you got the knack of it, to *keep* the Scout Laws as it was to break them!

Dick's step sounded outside. The door was flung open—then Dick stood stock-still with amazement. "Hello, Josie," he jeered.

Mr. Darby was just behind him. "Got a new nurse-girl, old woman?" he added genially. But Joe only smiled, cheerily. As long as it wasn't a jeer like Dick's, he didn't mind.

"You don't feel sick, do ye, Joe?" went on Mr. Darby, jokingly. But Joe knew this was his father's way of commending him for it.

It was on the tip of Joe's tongue to explain about Scouts then and there. But with Dick present, and his father in a jovial mood, Joe thought better of it. He'd try it a little longer. Maybe—maybe he *wouldn't* be able to keep them enough to be a Scout, anyway. No; it was wiser to try, just a little, first. He'd broken several in the ten minutes since he had resolved to keep them; but he'd be hanged if he'd break any more!

"Where's my old pipe?" asked Mr. Darby.

"Oh, hang!" thought Joe. "I'm beginning *to-day* on the Laws, and 'tain't fair to go back with something I did last week."

Mr. Darby fumbled on the shelf where he always kept it. "Some one's busted it," he discovered, holding up the two pieces which had once been one. "Who, now? You, Liz? Or Mame?"

The little girls huddled together and protested in concert like scared birds.

“You, Joe? You’ll all deny it, I suppose!”

Joe sighed. How hard it was to keep the Scout Laws!

“I broke it—couple days ago—didn’t mean to—”

Mr. Darby stared at the boy. A new note in Joe’s voice puzzled him. Where was the old angry, vehement denial he was used to—even when he knew Joe had done it? Never before had he known Joe to own up, voluntarily, to doing anything. And here he was, not only acknowledging it, when he could have lied, but doing so in a quiet, respectful tone.

“Well, it’s all right. That there stem always was a-gittin’ choked up.”

Mr. Darby’s tones were different, too—more as if he and Joe were companions. Wasn’t it *easy*, after all, to keep the Scout Laws! thought Joe, all aglow inside his heart.

But it wasn’t always easy, Joe found in the next few days. It wasn’t even easy to remember, all the time, that there were such things as the Scout Laws, and that he had promised himself to keep them. It meant being helpful at home—and it was queer how many things there were that he could do when he looked for them. It meant being *loyal*—not contrasting that home with Roy’s, or envying him his luxuries. It meant being kind and friendly to Lizzie and Mary; hitherto he had either let them alone, or else plagued them. so they

wouldn't bother him. He was surprised to find how interesting his sisters were when he got acquainted. It meant even holding the baby, almost every day, in the interval between Joe's arrival home, and dinner. He was too big and heavy, thought Joe, for the little girls to lift. It meant—oh, it seemed to mean a billion things that Joe had never given a thought to before, nor wanted to give a thought to.

It was all the more provoking, because Joe had been feeling rather proud of himself lately. Hadn't he turned over a new leaf in school, behaved himself, studied hard, earned money, and given that money to Sis? Hadn't he cut his old rough companions, giving up going out with them nights? Why, he hadn't been to the movies since he started in with Roy, except on Saturdays; and he used to go almost every day. He could scarcely tell where the days had gone; they passed so quickly, with every minute taken. School—Roy in the afternoon—study at night—that was his daily round. Even Saturdays, he had devoted partly to reading to Sis, and partly to making up the back work that he continually felt the need of; and now—he found so many things to do to *help* Saturdays!

But when Joe got most discouraged, he would turn to other parts of the *Handbook*—the exciting, entrancing parts, that told of such things as campcraft, woodcraft, life-saving, tracking, trailing,

and signaling. Somewhere else in the *Handbook*, too, he found the statement that there were 200,000 boys in the country who were Scouts. *They* were living up to the Scout Laws!

“I’m not a-goin’ to be stumped, where two hundred thousand chaps have won out. It’ll take more than one page of printing to stump me!” he muttered to himself. And when Joe Darby looked as he looked when he said that, there was something going to smash before he gave in.

CHAPTER XIII

DICK AGAIN

DICK had let Joe severely alone for some time—so long that Joe secretly wondered why. Was he, perhaps, mindful of Pete Foley's defeat, and *afraid* of Joe's revenge, because he—Dick—had got Joe into trouble over that "teasing of Sis." The thought was a very pleasant one to Joe—to keep his big brother toeing the mark because he was afraid not to!

Joe was apparently confirmed in this theory by Dick's again trying hard to make friends. Two or three times he asked Joe to go with him to his club of big fellows—an honor which Joe appreciated and wanted to accept, but couldn't; for every hour of Joe's day was full. Then he asked Joe to the movies whenever he went; but Joe again had to decline.

Joe sometimes wondered whether Dick had any thought of getting his work with Roy away from him. Or perhaps he wanted to get Joe in disgrace there, so he would lose his place. Perhaps his father and Joe had both been mistaken about those diamonds. For all of a sudden Dick began to like to talk about Roy—or rather, to get Joe to talk

about him. Several times he tried to arrange to meet Joe on his way from the Manners house. But always his eagerness betrayed there was hidden reason for all this.

"Can't you go to the movies to-morrow afternoon?" Dick would ask. "They're playing *Treasure Island*. I'll meet you on your way home. Let's see—where did you say Roy lives?"

But something strained in his voice made Joe look up from the book he was studying. Dick was trying to look unconcerned and not succeeding. His eyes glittered too eagerly, as he leaned forward to hear Joe's answer.

"I didn't say," answered Joe, impatiently. "No, I can't go. Got to study." His father's words came back to him: "Don't tell Dick where that there feller lives. Don't let him worm it out o' ye, or trick it out o' ye, or scare it out o' ye." Joe knew only too well what his father had had in mind when he issued that command, though neither would speak of it. Seeing Dick's eyes glitter now, made Joe think of it, and showed him they might be right.

"Why are you so scared of tellin' where he lives?" persisted Dick, wheedlingly. "'Fraid I'll get your job away from you?"

"Why are you so crazy about knowing?" asked Joe. "Huh! Don't I know you wouldn't work if you had the chance?"

"I ain't," lied Dick. "What is it to me?"

Only, you act so funny about it. Easy enough to look in the directory, or the 'phone book."

Now Joe congratulated himself. Dick's remark showed he *had* been thinking about it, and probably looking. But Joe had looked ahead of Dick, and knew Mrs. Manners did not have a telephone, and also that, since they had moved into that house only recently, her address in the directory was not the correct one. Of course Dick *might* go to the old address, and ask there; and possibly find out. But Joe hardly thought he would. If he wanted the address for what Joe assumed, Dick wouldn't want a clew like that to exist.

"Needn't be so close-mouthed," repeated Dick, drumming on the table with his fingers. "What kind of a dog was it you said Roy had?" he asked after a pause, during which Joe bent over his books and showed no sign of continuing the conversation.

"That's all you know about it. They haven't any d—" Joe was checked by the significance of what he had said, *if* Dick intended—! "That is, I've never noticed one. They probably have a big savage one that they don't let see any one. Most of the folks round there do."

"Oh, do they?" sneered Dick. "Rich neighborhood, is it?" he inquired, with a look which said to Joe, "I understand that bluff!"

It was several days later before Dick and Joe were again alone; for Joe avoided this state of affairs whenever he could.

Joe was sitting beside Sis's bed in the twilight. She had had a hard day, full of pain; and after Joe's quiet talk had dropped to sleep. There were only a few minutes before dinner—not enough to use for study—so Joe stayed where he was for fear of disturbing her.

There sounded a whistle from the street. Joe didn't know Dick had come in; but a moment later he came tiptoeing through—never noticing Joe—and leaned out of the window.

"Found out yet?" Joe heard some one ask.

"No; but I'm goin' to—to-night. The old man's goin' to take the old woman to the movies, and if you'll come—*we'll find out!*" and Dick laughed the cruel, sneering laugh that always grated on Joe's ears.

Joe's first thought was always of Roy. Of course there was that one thing—Roy's address—that Dick wanted to find out; but equally of course there were other things Dick's mind was concerned about. And what could "the old man's" going to the movies have to do with learning Roy's address? Joe told himself he was getting daffy over that subject.

After dinner he rather expected, from Dick's words, that he would go out. Joe fervently hoped he would; but he didn't. The little girls fluttered about, getting ready; Mrs. Darby put Johnny and the baby to bed, and got ready herself; and the

party was ready to start. Mr. Darby stopped in the doorway.

“Goin’ out, Dick?” he asked.

“Naw,” responded Dick.

“If you two boys fight—*I’ll teach ye*,” threatened their father. “Mind, now.”

“Sis is asleep and so are the babies,” added Mrs. Darby, in her timorous voice, pleadingly. “If you’re not noisy they won’t wake up.”

Mr. Darby slammed the door. He understood her timid warning, with its plea, quite as well as Joe and Dick.

Joe would have chosen to study in some other room than with Dick. But the light in the parlor was too high up to study by, even if it wouldn’t have wakened Sis by shining in her eyes. So, with a sigh, Joe spread out his books on the kitchen table. Dick was already settled, doing nothing, with feet up, and cigarette in his mouth. His old evil smile broke over his face now and then.

Joe resolved he wouldn’t be either cajoled or bluffed into a fight. You never needed to fight unless you wanted to; especially as Dick knew it wasn’t because he was afraid.

It seemed as though he had studied only a few minutes when there came a knock at the door, followed by the same whistle he had heard from the street. Dick’s face lighted, as if he had been expecting this. He sprang up to answer it, and

ushered in—Foley! When Joe saw his well-remembered face—there was still a scar on it that Joe was responsible for—Joe's heart went down in his boots. Two against one—with Dick and Foley for the two!

Joe didn't look up again. It wasn't any of his business if Dick did bring his friends in when he had been forbidden to. Maybe Dick thought he would get Joe discussing with him about that; but Joe would show him. That Dick just wasn't going to get Joe into trouble again; no, sir, not if Joe knew it!

Joe had a lot of work to do that night. Examinations were coming, and all the teachers were assigning extra long lessons so there would be more time for review. Joe was glad Foley didn't notice him, by a word or even a glance, even when Dick vanished for a moment into the inner rooms and left the two alone together.

Dick as suddenly reappeared.

"I've shut the three doors between us and the kids," reported Dick. "They won't hear anything. Joe!" he turned suddenly to him, "we want something of you, and we're goin' to have it, see?"

Something in the two pairs of eyes fixed on him made Joe spring to his feet with excitement.

"What?" he demanded.

"Just tell us the address of that friend o' yours,

an' we won't hurt you. Then goody boy can go back to his 'ittle booksies."

"I'd like to know what you want it for!"

"None o' your business."

"Then that's easily settled. I shan't." Joe sat down again, outwardly calm but inwardly shaking. "And you won't hurt me, anyway."

"We'll see about that!" threatened Dick. "Won't we, Pete?"

"You bet we will," echoed Foley.

"You don't either of you dare tackle me alone!" cried Joe, scornfully; excited by the knowledge that what he said was true.

"That's all right, sonny. We don't have to worry about that this time. Hold him, Dick. I've got a score to settle with him."

Both Dick and Foley made a concerted rush toward Joe. Joe tried to meet them both: but one went on each side; Joe's feet got tangled up in the chair he overturned; and down he went, with both of them on top of him. Even in that exciting moment, Joe's thoughts flashed back to Dauntless Dermot, the Boy Lieutenant, thrashing eight full-grown mutineers; and he realized, rather grimly, how stupidly impossible his former pet book really was.

"Things are different, now," taunted Foley, slapping his cheek. "Tell us that address—quick—if you know what's good for you!"

"Not much!" answered Joe, bracing himself for the pummeling that came.

"Will you *now*?"

"No!"

"I'll punch your head—"

"Go on."

"Oh, just thumping him's no good," put in Dick, getting tired of holding back Joe's ceaseless struggles to free himself. "He gets plenty o' them from the old man. Try somethin' different."

Foley came to Dick's rescue as Joe nearly wrenched free. "Punch him hard," said Foley. "He'll squeal in a minute. I can see it in his eye."

That was what Joe was afraid of,—that by-and-by he wouldn't *want* to hold out any longer. So Foley could see it already! No, Foley was bluffing!

Dick took his turn at punching. "Oh, try somethin' different," he suggested. "You must know."

"Twist his arm—burn his hand with a hot poker," responded Foley, with glee.

But Joe was too wary to give them a chance to get hold of his arm; and the corner he was in hindered his opponents from getting at him conveniently, both at once.

"Bring him out in the floor," ordered Foley.

Joe didn't want to be forced from his corner,

but he couldn't help himself. Once more the scuffle began. Dick and Foley were not self-controlled enough to keep from giving way to sundry shouts of encouragement and execration. "Good," thought Joe, "the more noise the better!"

There came a thundering knock on the door. All three paused.

"What's the row in there? You're disturbing the whole house. Quit it, or we'll call the police."

Dick and Foley looked at each other. That *they* didn't want the police was quite evident.

Then Dick spoke, in a voice which imitated Mr. Darby's. He could do it to perfection. "If a man can't thrash his own boy when he needs it, I'd like to know the reason why?"

"Oh, is that it?" laughed the person outside. "Well, he needn't disturb the whole house, unless the boy's bigger than he is." Then Joe heard a comment to some one else outside: "It's only that Joe Darby catchin' it again," he explained. "Poor little beggar."

"Daresay he needs it. He's a tough one," answered the other, as their footsteps receded down the stairs.

But the pause had given Joe time to think. He hadn't thought of the door before. There was no sense in staying there, and it wouldn't be cowardice to run. Of course Dick had locked the outside door, but he had left the key in the keyhole.

So, when Dick and Foley turned their attention to him again, Joe—very warily, so they would not suspect—managed to get near the door in the next scuffle. Then, standing sidewise against it, he turned the key with his left hand before they realized what he was doing. Though they understood now, he was able to open it—to hold it open with his knee while he kept off a last attack—then to slip through, leaving his coat in Dick's hands. Pell-mell, he ran down the stairs; but nobody followed.

Fortunately, Joe met a schoolmate who lived in the lower flat; and the latter was glad to take Joe in, and let him sit by the parlor window, where he could watch for Mr. and Mrs. Darby's return. Joe knew there was no particular damage Dick and Foley could do—except perhaps to his books,—and he would have to risk that. They probably would play poker the entire evening. He hated wasting the time, which he needed for study; but it couldn't be helped—and anyway, he *hadn't* told—and a Scout is cheerful!

Joe saw the Darby party when they turned the corner of the block; so he was able to hurry up the stairs ahead of them. Dick and Foley looked up from their cards when Joe entered.

"That means the old man's comin' pretty soon," said Dick to Foley, meaningly. Foley understood, swept the cards and the winnings into his pocket,

and vanished out of the flat like lightning. Joe dropped down into the chair by the table, and both presented an unusual scene of fraternal peace and quiet when the rest entered.

It was a week or two later when Dick came upon Joe reading the *Handbook*. Dick stopped and stared. His attention was caught by the semaphore signalers on the cover.

"What's that you're readin'?" he asked. "Oh!" disgustedly. "Boy Scout stuff! Where'd you get it? Roy? Le's see it."

Joe thought he'd just let Dick see how interesting the book was that he scorned. So Joe passed the book over, rather readily. And, too, it might do Dick as much good as it had done him.

"It's great," said Joe, enthusiastically. "It tells you so much!"

Dick took it eagerly, and opened it at once. Something in his manner made Joe look up again.

"Yes, it does! Thanks, awfully!" sneered Dick. He slapped the book together and handed it back to Joe with a triumphant leer.

A sudden cold fear came over Joe. He opened the book—it opened easily to the flyleaf—and on that flyleaf he saw, in the square hand that the blind use when they write with a pencil: Roy's name and address!

Dick knew! *Dick knew where Roy lived!* Joe's own carelessness and thoughtlessness and prig-

gishness had done it—his carelessness with a book Roy had loaned him!—his priggishness at the conceited thought of *reforming* Dick!

Although it was something Joe had been thinking much about for the past month, he couldn't make it seem possible now that the thing he had dreaded had actually come about. And what was he to do now? There was *no way* he could warn them of Dick, as Dick well knew. There was no way of stopping Dick, and Joe quickly put away a thought of telling his father.

"I've *got* to *stop* him," thought Joe desperately. "I've just *got* to. But *how*? How shall I ever—*know when!*" He gritted his teeth. "*I'll stop him—somehow!*"

But the *how* of that somehow troubled Joe more than he would confess even to himself!

CHAPTER XIV

TWO PEOPLE LEARN SOMETHING

THE worry over *when* Dick was going to do it, and the responsibility Joe had assumed to prevent Dick's doing it, made Joe's life for the next seven days a round of misery. During the day he felt easy about Dick; for he and Dick both knew that Mrs. Manners wore her rings all the day, so there was no chance of a robbery then. But in the evening Joe watched Dick like a hawk. If he didn't come home as usual, or if he went out at all in the evening, Joe was nearly crazy. The result was, that Joe lost his appetite; he didn't sleep nights; he became so fidgety that he broke things around the house, and so irritable that even Sis wondered. At first he thought that the rest of the family didn't notice it; but, coming home one night a bit later than usual, he was soon disabused of even that comfortable assurance.

As he paused for breath, at the top of the four flights of stairs, before opening the door, Joe found his father had already come home. The sound of his voice always made Joe pause, involuntarily, to see whether he were in a cross or a pleasant mood.

"What in the dickens is the matter with that

Joe lately?" he heard Mr. Darby grumble, just as he was about to turn the door-knob.

"Have *you* noticed it too?" asked Mrs. Darby in a worried voice. "He hasn't been himself at all lately. I'm 'fraid he's sick."

"Sick, nawthin'," commented Mr. Darby, shortly.

"He may be comin' down with something," she ventured.

"Well, I'll find out what he's comin' down with, all right," asserted Mr. Darby, in no uncertain tone.

"I dunno, but sometimes he acts just like Jack acted, before—" his mother's voice trailed away pathetically, as it always did when she spoke of Jack—who had run away from home three years ago and never been heard from since.

"*I'll* put a flea in his ear about runnin' away," assured Mr. Darby, grimly.

"Now don't be hasty—he's been a good boy lately—helped me a lot—"

"Now, old lady, *you* can't understand boys. Like enough when he's too good he's only plannin' some divilment. But *I* know what'll fetch 'em." (Joe wondered if it were the trunk strap he referred to.) The fact that Mr. Darby's superior understanding had resulted in one boy's being a worthless loafer, and the next one's running away, didn't seem to disturb Mr. Darby's equanimity in the least. "I'll interview him," promised he.

So, thought Joe, outside, he didn't have enough worries—there was an "interview" coming with his father! He opened the door and slunk in. The fact that his father was watching him added to his guilty, self-conscious look. But he was permitted to pass through the kitchen unmolested. He went into the parlor and sat down to think.

So he was to expect soon, that Mr. Darby would question him. What was he to say? Could he tell him? "No," concluded Joe, decidedly. "This is *my* job. I'm goin' to see it through alone. I'm responsible for it, and I'll straighten it out. Anyway, what could *he* do about it, more than I could do?"

"Joe! Joe! How many times do ye want to be called to meals?"

Joe sighed. He had all he could carry before—now there was that "interview" ahead of him. He went slowly out and took his place at the table. But he ate still less than ever, and sat pecking away at one piece of bread, hoping no one would notice.

"Joe, what ails you? You ain't eatin'. You ain't sick, are you?" asked his mother, anxiously.

Joe frowned. Why would they keep worrying him? What did they care, except that it bothered him!

"You sick?" repeated Mr. Darby, sharply. "Since when did ye stop speakin' when you're spoke to?"

Joe didn't dare look up. "No, sir," he answered.

"Then you eat your dinner. Hear me?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Joe, sulkily; and crammed a huge piece of bread into his mouth. Evidently the "interview" was going to be a painful one. Joe wished his father wouldn't treat him like a kid. He'd do *anything* for him, when his eyes twinkled into Joe's, and he spoke as one man to another. Mr. Darby's eyes did not twinkle tonight, but glowered. For he had thought, one while, that Joe might be going to turn out differently; and it didn't look so now.

As luck would have it, one of the neighbors came in, asking Mrs. Darby to come and hear their new phonograph records. Mrs. Darby took the baby, and the little girls went, too. Dick went out on the street—much to Joe's uneasiness—so Joe was left alone with his father. Conditions were propitious for an "interview!"

Joe cleared a place on the table and started to study; but things went wrong from the start. He broke his pencil-point two or three times; his algebra examples *would not* come out right. He frowned and fidgeted, and clutched his hair and chewed his pencil, all the time wanting, but not daring, to look up at Mr. Darby, who sat smoking with his feet on the stove.

Poor Joe was in misery. He *had* to sit there and try—no, pretend, to study. There was no

other time to do his lessons, and no other place to go. Any minute Mr. Darby might begin to ask him questions. His examples were all wrong, and he knew it; but he could copy them for handing in and get credit for having tried them, and for the parts that were right.

So thinking, Joe reached jerkily for the ink-bottle. He didn't quite reach it, but he did succeed in tipping it over. A black stream flowed toward Mrs. Darby's new table-cloth, pushed back for Joe's studying. With an exclamation, Joe tried to push it out of the way—and instead pushed a cup from the edge of the table.

Joe heard his father rouse himself, as the boy started to pick up the pieces of crockery.

"What's the matter wi' you lately?" he began.

"Nawthin'," answered Joe; glad he was under the table at that particular moment. But he couldn't stay there very long!

"That makes four dishes you've broke this week," continued Mr. Darby.

"Well, I didn't mean to—" Joe was wiping up the ink now, with his back to the enemy.

Mr. Darby waited in silence till Joe, finishing the ink, sat down and started to study again. Mr. Darby continued to study *him*.

"You ain't e't anything meal-times f'r three or four days," he announced. "Are you sick?"

Joe shook his head. The interview was coming—*now!* To himself he thought "A Scout is

brave," but he didn't feel very brave. He wished it were over.

"You're worryin' about somethin'," went on the man.

Joe laid down his pencil and looked away. Mr. Darby went on,

"What is it?"

Joe muttered, "Nawthin'."

"That's a lie. Sis is all right? And you and Sis?"

Joe nodded.

"Anything wrong with your job?"

Joe shook his head.

"Goin' t' git left in school?"

Again Joe wagged his head.

"Dick been botherin' ye?"

Well, Dick *had* been bothering him, but not in the way Mr. Darby meant. So Joe shook his head for a third time.

"What is it, then?" But Joe sat silent, knitting his black brows.

"I arsked ye a question," went on Mr. Darby, with growing irritation at having been put off so long. "Maybe with your fine new job you're too fine to speak to your father, hey? We'll see about that!"

"You know that isn't so," said Joe, flushing at the implication, but speaking gently.

Now Joe's very quietness was a source of irritation to Mr. Darby, because he couldn't under-

stand it. A sudden thought struck the man. "He's been with this soft blind chap so much *he's* gittin' soft! Gittin' feard o' me, he is—feard I'll git mad an' hurt him, by gum! Well, I will. If he needs hardening, I can *harden* him!" So he jerked out,—

"Come here, you!"

Joe rose more promptly than he answered. It would soon be over now.

"I'll teach ye to tell me what I know and what I don't know!" he said, snarlingly. "I know what's the matter with ye. Plannin' to run away from home, hey? I'll say just this—Go! The sooner the better. But when ye come back I'll give ye one thrashin' that you'll remember."

Joe fumbled with a button on his coat. Was he to blame that Dick was what he was? Wasn't he simply trying to keep his own job, in spite of Dick. His father ought to trust him. It wasn't fair—no, it wasn't fair; for Dick to loaf, and he to work, and then have Dick worry him for fear Dick would make him lose his place. Nor it wasn't fair for his father to bother him just because things were all snarled up through no fault of his own.

"Speak, or I'll know the reason why. What's wrong with ye? Stop sulkin'." The sight of Joe twiddling his button, and looking what Mr. Darby considered both sulky and "scared of a lickin'" made Mr. Darby sure of what the boy needed. He struck at Joe. Joe wanted, for Sis's

sake, to have it go on as quietly as possible. But Mr. Darby tipped over his own chair as he rose; and Joe, staggering to keep his feet, tipped over another. Joe heard Sis call from way in to her room. A thought occurred to him: if he ran out of the flat and down-stairs, Mr. Darby would follow, and Sis wouldn't hear any of it. Joe acted on this impulse, and bolted down the stairs.

Mr. Darby was now thoroughly angry; thoroughly sure that his diagnosis of Joe's case as cowardice was right; doubly angry because it *was* right; and provoked that the neighbors should know about his paternal difficulties and duties. So he followed Joe. The racket they made caused doors to fly open along the way.

"Old man Darby chasin' his boy," explained one to another.

"Some speed in that kid! I bet on him," jollied another.

"See him go it! Lickety-split!"

Down in the basement "old man Darby" caught up with his boy, as Joe had planned.

"I've got ye cornered," he exulted, angrier than Joe had ever seen him. "You'll only catch it worse when I do get ye!"

Joe, behind a big box, only waited. He had been afraid of that, but still he was glad he had come. Mr. Darby approached cautiously. Joe was good at dodging, and was lighter on his feet than the tired laborer.

"I know that," said Joe, quietly. "I'm coming out. I'm not—afraid." The laugh at his cowardice on the way had stung his pride. "I want you to know—why I came down here—so—Sis—wouldn't hear. I didn't just—run away."

Joe came out quietly as soon as he had said that, and walked up to his father.

Mr. Darby hesitated. He didn't know this new, queer, quiet Joe. The boy certainly wasn't acting scared now. *He* hadn't thought of Sis. Bah! Joe was just pretending, now he was caught, so he would get off easy. He was only growing slick, like Dick.

"Yes; a whole lot you did," he announced, when he had Joe secure in his hands. "Ye didn't look like runnin'! Why don't ye think o' Sis before ye act so, then?" And he prepared to give Joe a cuffing.

"And I wish—you wouldn't hit me—where it shows," added Joe. "Not for myself—my job—"

"All right. Take off y'r coat an' pass me that rope, an' I wun't!" laughed Mr. Darby, grimly, not thinking he meant it, except to beg off; for a few cuffs didn't seem to *him* to compare with what he called "a good regular thrashin'." Yet here was Joe asking for it! Well: he'd *get* it! He'd see what it was he was asking for!

To his surprise, Joe looked relieved; threw off his coat and handed Mr. Darby what he needed.

Mr. Darby didn't know Joe was saying to himself "A Scout is brave," all the while as he did it, and hoping that he looked braver than he felt. A moment before Mr. Darby had been angry because of Joe's apparent fear; now he was angry because he thought he could no longer control him by fear. He'd see; and so would Joe!

And so Joe "got it," with thoroughness and dispatch.

"Put on y'r coat an' come upstairs," said Mr. Darby, as he let go of Joe. He was puzzled that Joe had not burst out into a passion of angry imprecations, as he did the last time; for Mr. Darby had made up his mind to test his theory of softness, and he knew exactly how much muscle he had used. He had no way of knowing, though, that Joe simply had been saying to himself, "This is just what I deserve for lettin' Dick fool me."

"I'll come—in a minute," gulped Joe. He needed a few minutes by himself to calm down.

"Don't make me come after ye," warned Mr. Darby, as he went upstairs.

The first thing that greeted him was a call from Sis.

"Daddy, did you hurt my Joe?" she asked reproachfully.

"Not so he wun't get over it," said Mr. Darby tenderly. *He* realized, now, for the first time, that when he hurt Joe he did hurt Sis. "Ye don't un-

derstand. Boys has to git so many tannin's t' make 'em good for anything.

"But what's the matter wi' Joe lately? Do *you* know?" he asked, thinking perhaps she held the key to the mystery.

"Oh, my!" she cried in delight. "Have *you* noticed, then—that he's different?"

Mr. Darby might have said—as he thought—"I've just given him the darndest licking because of that difference!" What he did say, however, was a gentle, "So you're in the secret, hey?"

"There's no secret, exactly. He's been livin' up to the Scout Laws."

"What's *that*?" asked Mr. Darby, blankly.

"Oh—don't you know?" Sis's tone implied that her father knew everything under the sun worth knowing.

"Seems t' me I've heard tell of Scouts," he replied vaguely. "But you tell."

"I can't tell as well as the book can. We keep it here, because I read it as much as Joe," she laughed, pulling it from under her pillow. "It's so splendid to have a big brother like that." She turned to the well-worn page of the Scout Oath and the Scout Laws, and passed it to Mr. Darby.

He read it, slowly and wonderingly. It was almost beyond his understanding that a boy—a boy like *his Joe!*—would, of his own accord choose to try to live up to such a code. But now he

thought he understood, some of the small differences in Joe—his unwonted self-restraint appeared in a new light; his quiet answers, and prompt obedience were not from fear. His thoughtfulness of Sis—his helping round the house—!

Mr. Darby thumped his knee with his fist. If being a Scout *did* mean all that—could do all these things to Joe—the sooner Joe became one, the better. He would find out what it cost, though; the pictures showed Scouts in uniform, with all sorts of equipment.

“Suppose that for Joe to be a Scout, meant I’d have to borrow from your fund?” he asked Sis, just to hear what she’d say. Her answer staggered him.

“Do you *mean*—you’d really *do* it!” she shrieked, delightedly. “He deserves it, but he’d never think of such a thing, nor he wouldn’t let you do it if he knew. But you see—I couldn’t help hearing what he did with his dollar—and it isn’t fair for me to take every cent of it—”

“Well, well; we’ll see,” said Mr. Darby, to quiet her. “So that’s what’s been worryin’ Joe!” he thought. (Quite incorrectly, however.) “Of all the fool boys!”

“But the money’s the worst trouble, isn’t it?” she asked. “I wouldn’t want him to be a Scout and not have a uniform and look like one. Wouldn’t Joe look dandy in that—see!” She showed her father the picture. “I’d like to see

him in it," she added wistfully—unconsciously making the strongest plea she could have made.

"Well, well; we'll see," said Mr. Darby again. "Say; how did Joe get on track of Scouts?" he asked.

"Oh, Roy is one, and he lent him the *Handbook*," she explained.

Sitting rather limply on the box, the boy wondered if he had looked scared. The first thing he did after his father went upstairs was to go over to an abandoned bureau that happened to be near, and look at himself in the cracked mirror. He was surprised and rather ashamed at the excited face that glared back at him.

"Guess I won't go up lookin' like this," he muttered. He knew Sis would call him in as soon as he got there. So he leaned back and meditated. Had he carried out the Scout Laws? He began to repeat them.

"*A Scout is trustworthy*—I could have lied and saved myself—but I didn't!" *A Scout is loyal*—yes, he had been loyal to his brother Dick by not telling, and loyal to Sis, because telling might have resulted in dismissal. Had he been loyal, in not telling, to his parents? Joe wasn't sure. Maybe it wasn't fair to his father to let Dick get himself into trouble, and perhaps the rest, without telling. But whichever way you looked at this question, there was something wrong and something right. *A Scout is helpful*—his

mother had said he had been helpful, Joe remembered, with a glow of pride; yet on top of that his father—but that thought was disloyal. He had helped Sis, just now, by taking a worse punishment so she wouldn't hear it. Perhaps, though, she would be worrying about him till he returned and showed a cheerful—no, sir, a *smiling* face. He tried this now, but didn't succeed. *A Scout is obedient*—had he been? Not exactly, because his father had told him to tell what was worrying him, and he hadn't. But that was only because—Oh, there was that same old double-sided problem again. *A Scout is cheerful*—No, it certainly wasn't a cheerful countenance that glared back at him. Nor he hadn't been cheerful upstairs, in his answers, nor courteous, either. *A Scout is brave*—He knew he had been brave. He had been afraid; he had had good reason to be; but being brave didn't mean, not being afraid, but acting “in spite of fear.”

Joe heard some one coming along the cemented passageway that led from the sidewalk steps to the dumbwaiter. Some late-working delivery-boy, he thought. He didn't want to be found thus; so he slipped down behind a big packing-box.

As soon as the person came in sight Joe knew it wasn't a delivery-boy. It was one of Dick's cronies; it was—yes, Foley! Joe drew a deep breath of anticipation. Foley looked about first,

then he put his lips to the dumbwaiter whistle that Joe knew was theirs, and blew.

It was Dick's voice that answered. So he had come in, thought Joe, in relief. Dick must have been expecting him, for Dick never stirred himself to answer the dumbwaiter whistle. Joe waited, breathless with suspense.

"Sparklers?" asked Foley.

"Well?"

"To-night."

"All right. Shut up," came Dick's guarded answer. Foley then slammed the dumbwaiter door and went jauntily out.

Joe fairly gasped at his good-fortune, *Sparklers* easily stood for diamonds. *To-night* was clear in itself. By the strangest chain of coincidences Joe had been able to learn the night of Dick's intended robbery without the slightest suspicion! If he hadn't worried over it—if his father hadn't noticed it—if he hadn't refused to tell—if he hadn't thought of Sis when his father got angry—Joe wouldn't have been down here just when he had been. If he had been upstairs, Dick would have known he knew.

Now his first care was to keep Dick from suspecting. His father had probably mentioned where Joe was, or might mention it casually when Joe went upstairs. So Joe thought out a ruse worthy of Dauntless Dermot. He took pains to

go out of the cellar onto the street. Then he hurried upstairs. He meant to make Dick feel that he had not been in the basement when Foley was there.

Dick was in great good humor when Joe entered. "Been teasin' Sis again?" he asked, as a pleasantry. "Have a handkerchief, for 'is 'ittle red nose."

"None o' your business!" growled Joe.

"Dick, you let Joe alone," interposed Mr. Darby, to Joe's surprise. "You took a darned long time to come up from the basement," he observed to Joe, with a laugh that Joe felt was meant to be friendly—though he couldn't fathom why!

"I went out on the street a minute," answered Joe truthfully; and was rewarded by seeing Dick look relieved. A little later Joe made occasion to turn conversation that way, and ask:

"Where's our friend Foley, anyway? He hasn't been at school since our difference. Has he left town?"

Joe imagined that a last vestige of worry on Dick's face cleared away at that question—as Joe had intended it should. And how readily Dick lied:

"Foley? Oh, I haven't seen him since—you and I saw him."

Joe picked up his books into a neat pile. "Guess I'd rather study in the morning," he said. "Will somebody wake me at six?"

"Goin' to bed early, hey?" grinned Mr. Darby, meaningly.

Joe grinned back sheepishly, "I'm tired to-night," he evaded. "I'd rather do my work in the morning."

And he thought Dick looked relieved again.

His next problem, now Dick thought he didn't know, and that he would be soon safe in bed, was to go over his plans for preventing the robbery. He could do that in bed. He had to go to bed to fool Dick, and to deceive them all. He must see Sis first.

Sis greeted him with a radiant face. "I've told dad—about the Scouts!" she announced proudly. "He was real interested—"

"But when in the world?" he interrupted.

"Just now, to-night."

Joe couldn't believe his ears. There hadn't been a time that had appeared auspicious enough for him to dare broach the subject; and least of all to-night, just after Mr. Darby had given him "a good one!" Of course, Sis hadn't known about that. That was why she had ventured.

"What did he say?" asked Joe.

"Oh, he was real interested, and looked at the *Handbook*, and is going to look at it again."

"Sis," said Joe, solemnly, "*you're* the very best Scout I know!"

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

JOE started to go to bed almost as soon as he had finished his talk with Sis. In spite of present physical discomforts resulting from events in the basement, his spirits felt a strange thrill. For circumstances had played most unbelievably into his hands; he had outwitted Dick in the most vital of matters; his father was not unwilling for him to become a Scout; and that night he was going forth through the dark on his first great adventure. All the tales he had read came to him in procession. He thought of the ancient knights, setting forth on a quest that was to prove them worthy of knighthood. He thought of the old pioneer Scouts, pursuing their silent vigils, or silent trackings, through the forest against their relentless enemies. *He*, too, was going forth that night, on a great adventure and a tremendous task: to save his friends without their knowing it; and to save his brother, against his will.

He walked on air as he broke away from the noisily chattering circle in the kitchen. What if Dick did jeer, and his father joke, because he

wanted to go to bed so early? His mother looked anxious and his sisters awed, as he passed them. He thought they were pitying him. He didn't know that the effort to act as usual, and the inward knowledge of his great adventure gave his countenance a shining look of manliness new to it.

Joe slept on a couch in what the architect had planned as a dining-room for the five-room flat; but which was shared as a sleeping-room by Joe, Dick, and five-year-old Johnny. This made it easy for Joe to follow Dick's movements that night.

Joe felt his heart beat more rapidly as he flung off his clothes. This act was the beginning of his adventure; although all he had to do, now, for a long space of time, was to wait—wait till all the family came to bed. Dick would be last; then Dick would keep silent till everybody was asleep; finally he would stealthily, silently rise, dress, and go out. Then Joe would stealthily, silently rise, dress, and follow him, and the real adventure would begin.

For awhile Joe lay and planned. He was watching his armor now! Just how he was to prevent the robbery he didn't know. He must depend on circumstances for a hint. First, he thought he would follow Dick closely; then he thought if Dick turned around and saw him, he could not help recognizing Joe. Besides, if Dick went into a saloon or into his club—as he would

be quite likely to do—he might go out by a different entrance, and so be lost to Joe. No; Joe decided that, as soon as Dick went out, he would go himself; but he would make hot speed for Roy's house, and get there ahead of Dick, who doubtless had to meet Foley and plan details. Joe would linger about till Dick and Foley appeared; then he would meet them—his heart thumped excitedly at this detail!—tell them he knew, promise he would give alarm if they persisted, or to pursue them with justice if they overcame him by force and succeeded. After all, it wasn't such fun doing the exciting things that Dauntless Dermitt performed as a daily routine, and thought nothing of.

Why didn't the folks come to bed? Joe tossed about uneasily. He felt so restless he was sorry, now, he had gone to bed so early. For there would be hours of waiting, while Dick waited to make sure every one was asleep before he ventured to start. Here Joe was thankful for his father's ministrations in the cellar, which were most effectual in keeping him awake, out of sheer discomfort. For just now, curled up on a soft bed in the dark, he felt so worn out with worrying, so sleepy with past sleeplessness, and so utterly weary, that every now and then he thought he was going to lose himself in sleep the very next minute.

At last he heard Lizzie and Mary lead the way to bed. It was always a straggling procession: the two little girls; then Johnny; then Mr. and

Mrs. Darby; then Dick, whenever he didn't stay out all night. Joe was thankful to see it start; though he knew it would be some time before its termination.

Then in came Mrs. Darby, carrying the cross and sleepy Johnny. Joe kept perfectly still as she hovered about. He wished she'd think he was asleep. No such luck! When he was safely tucked in, she turned down the light as if she were going. But Johnny had thrown one of his shoes near Joe's bed. She came over to pick it up, and whispered as she did so:

"You 'wake, Joe?"

He couldn't deceive her; so he grunted an unwilling "Yes." She still hovered about.

"Joe—downstairs—did *he*—"

"Yes," he answered in a gruff whisper.

He felt her hand pat his shoulder.

"You all right, Joe?" she asked again.

"Sure."

Then she turned away, lingeringly. And, though he had squirmed under her kindly questions, yet they made Joe feel better. He didn't know when she'd been so sympathetic with him. Usually she agreed with Mr. Darby as to Joe's badness, while covering eyes and ears to escape hearing the results of it.

Joe knew there would be a half-hour now, while his father smoked and his mother mended, and they both talked, with the children out of the way.

A half-hour—thirty minutes—one thousand eight hundred seconds! That is a long time when you count it out, lying motionless in bed. He listened to the clock ticking—how slowly it went!

But at last Joe's waiting ears caught the sound of the bustle that meant the end. He heard his mother bolt the kitchen door; he heard his father wind the alarm-clock that woke him every morning. What was to happen before that alarm again rang its noisy summons!

Presently they passed through Joe's room. Mrs. Darby bent over Johnny to see if he were covered up well. Mr. Darby waited impatiently.

"You 'wake, Joe?" he asked. But Joe didn't answer.

"There! I told ye he was all right," he observed impatiently to Mrs. Darby.

"Sh-h! Don't wake him up," she warned, as they went onward. Joe giggled at the success of his ruse. He wondered what they had been saying about him, too.

Now, where was Dick? Had he, perhaps, slipped out before this? Joe thought not, for a light from the kitchen cast a faint glimmer on the wall.

"Dick," called Mr. Darby, "git t' bed, an' don't waste gas over that fool catalog. *You'll* never have any jewelry to worry about."

So Dick was looking over a jeweler's catalog!

Dick, with unwonted docility, came in directly.

Joe had thought he would be slick enough to do that.

"I'm goin' to bed now," he announced. "Gee, but I'm sleepy. You asleep, Joe?" he asked.

Joe kept silent again. Now came the test. He had to lie absolutely still, as though he were asleep. He even had to think of how to breathe as one would in natural sleep. And just because he couldn't stir, all the silly little nerves and muscles of his body seemed to be in a conspiracy to make him move. Something tickled his right foot; his left foot, under it, began to show the first prickly sensations of "going to sleep." All the many spots, too, on his anatomy, that smarted and ached and burned, seemed to try to make him move, even an inch.

But Dick got to bed so quickly that Joe could only wonder if he had taken off all his clothes. When he turned off the light, he announced loudly, "I'm in bed," to his parents. Then all was quiet.

Now—to keep perfectly still for the hours while Dick waited, listening. Wasn't it a queer situation: here was Dick, listening—here was Joe listening to Dick—all in the same tiny room not ten feet square. Dauntless Dermot's thrills were outdone already by real ones.

But it didn't seem as long to Joe as he had thought it would. The little girls were surely asleep long ago; it was the same with tired Johnny. Mr. and Mrs. Darby were always so tired that they

dropped into a heavy sleep immediately; and the noise of their snores came as a welcome sound, almost as soon as the place was quiet.

Presently Joe heard a stir; then, after an interval, another—a continued one this time. Dick's bed creaked—then a floor-board under his foot. *Dick was going!*

Joe's heart turned a somersault in his throat. He wanted to shout with excitement. He was afraid he would move; afraid he would betray by his very breathing that he was awake; afraid that Dick would feel the tension in the air, by some mysterious thought-process, and know that Joe was awake.

The darkness helped Joe; for of course Dick didn't dare light the gas. As Joe thought this, he could have pummeled himself for not having put his own clothes where he could easily find them in the dark. Dick hadn't been so stupid. There! Dick was all dressed now—he was tip-toeing in his stocking-feet into the kitchen. How silently he did it! Joe heard absolutely nothing for a time. Then came the faint click of the bolt on the kitchen door—another faint thud as the door was shut again—*Dick was gone!*

Joe lay perfectly still before he could stir. His hands clenched with the excitement of the moment.

Suppose—oh, suppose!—after Dick had successfully dressed and escaped—that they should wake in the next room and hear *him* dressing!

With cold hands Joe pushed back the bed-clothes. Adventures weren't nearly as much fun to *do* as they were to read about when Dauntless Dermitt did them.

That dressing was almost a nightmare to Joe. He couldn't find his clothes without a hunt for each article. Apparently his mother had picked up after him and laid them neatly on various chairs. It was so dark and still! The bed creaked and the floor clamored beneath his feet; his hands and feet kept bumping up against things in the dark. And Mr. Darby was only a bare ten feet away! Once the man stopped snoring and turned over with a mighty sigh!—and Joe felt himself turn white. He didn't dare move for the next five minutes after that.

At last, however, he was ready to follow Dick's example and tiptoe into the kitchen. By the door he put on his shoes; then he opened the door, into the dark, silent, chilly hall.

As he shut the door—thus locking himself out—Joe thought for the first time about next morning. *How would he come back?* He couldn't even picture how it would be. Would he tell? Would he be believed if he did tell? Then he chided himself sternly for wavering. The coming back made no difference to the job in hand, which *had* to be done!

Joe emerged into the dark, wet street. It had been a dull day when he came in; now, as if to

pile all possible discomforts onto a comfortless night, it was raining—a mean little drizzle, steady and cold, enough to chill heart as well as hands. Perhaps it was as well, thought Joe, as he hurried on. There would be less people about. But then, all the more noticeable were the people who were out. It seemed to Joe as if every corner he passed had its big, burly figure in blue standing back under shelter, swinging a suggestive club, and looking Joe over with questioning eyes as he slouched past.

He *mustn't* slouch past them, he told himself. Why should he feel afraid of them? He was going on an errand of tremendous importance. He, if any one, had a right to walk through the streets. He, if any one, should feel a comrade's feeling towards those men in blue, for he and they were allied—even if they were unaware—in the same function—the prevention of crime. Why should he feel like a criminal—he who held the secret plans of two robbers, by which he would prevent their crime! And the next policeman, he felt, didn't eye him so suspiciously, as he walked by with head up.

The block where Mrs. Manners lived was utterly quiet. Not a soul was passing through the silent street. The trim rows of silent houses frowned down upon him as an intruder upon their peace. For a moment Joe felt afraid—suppose Dick and Foley did succeed in their robbery—and suppose

some one was looking out, and saw *him*—Joe—and recognized him? “Maybe,” he thought for the first time—“Maybe I’ve been foolish in keepin’ it to myself. Maybe dad could have helped—” But it was too late now to think of that.

For the first time, another idea presented itself as a possibility: suppose Dick and Foley had planned to enter from the rear of the house.

Joe couldn’t even think what to do with himself while he waited for the robbers to appear. He ought to be out of sight—out of sight of any one who would recognize him and perhaps think he was connected with the robbery; and out of sight of Dick and Foley when they came. Where could he hide? Now the flat brick fronts, all alike in their bareness, mocked at him. “Find a place to hide in *us* if you can,” they seemed to say, with shocked respectability. One might as well try to hide in the middle of the big gym floor at school.

Joe intentionally passed Roy’s house on the opposite side of the street. He was thinking that he might perhaps sit on the steps of one of the houses across the street—a poor plan, to be sure. The first policeman would order him to move on. But worst of all, he would not be concealed there from Dick and Foley when they came along. He looked up at Mrs. Manners’ dark windows; and felt, in spite of his perplexity, a thrill of exaltation. *He* was there, protecting them, and they didn’t know it! They didn’t even know their danger—but *he*

did, and was there to save them! Then, when his eyes happened to fall to the basement, he saw that for once more in this terrible night fortune had favored him.

In the tiny court beside the front steps of the next house Joe saw a huge packing-case. Why it hadn't been taken apart in the process of unpacking was a marvel; likewise, why it hadn't been knocked to pieces after its contents had been removed. Perhaps it had been delivered late at night—too late to do anything save take out its contents. Perhaps the man who unpacked it didn't care to stay out in the rain just to take a box apart. Anyway, it was there! Once within it, Joe could wait, unseen and unsuspected, yet all-seeing.

Joe was too wary to cross the street right there—to be seen by any policeman that happened to be at the corner, or by Dick and Foley if they were coming. So the boy went on to the corner, crossed, and went around the entire block, to approach from the same direction as before, but on the other side of the street.

When he got to the house next Roy's, he turned into the court. Now he breathed more easily. Even if he were discovered in the box, they would only think he was a homeless lad seeking shelter from the rain. The packing-case stood with its open side pointing inward from the street. The cavity that yawned to receive him was a yard

wide and a yard deep, and stood perhaps four feet high—room a-plenty. There were spaces between the boards through which Joe could see the bottom step of the flight that led to the front door, and the top step of those leading downward into the basement court.

Joe pulled himself into the box, snail-like, made himself as comfortable as he could, and waited. If only there were not so much waiting in this adventure of his! It was so much harder to wait than to do!

For awhile it was even comfortable in the packing-case; for it was snug and out of the rain. But by and by came another trouble. The cold and the wet, and the darkness and silence—even the excitement—were so stupefying in their combined effect that Joe began to feel drowsy. The cold and the wet benumbed him; the darkness and silence lulled him; the continued excitement of all that had happened since he came home from school that afternoon, was so exhausting that Joe felt more tired than after the hardest day's work he had ever done. Again he felt a grim thankfulness for Mr. Darby's emphatic attentions of that evening. Joe hadn't had such a thrashing, he remembered, for a full two years. Wasn't it lucky it had come just when it did! Yet he couldn't to this minute tell just what it had been for!

Footsteps on the sidewalk—yes, approaching! Joe drew back from the knot-hole, but kept a steady

look fastened on the visible bit of sidewalk and steps. A shadow—two feet and a flapping rain-coat, topped by an umbrella—no, not Dick, or Foley. How long would he have to wait? Perhaps for hours! What if something kept Dick from attempting it that night? How would Joe get home, and in?

It did seem hours before Joe heard another step approaching. This step was softly cautious. Indeed, it was quite near before Joe heard it at all. It came nearer—hesitated just by Joe's shelter—then—yes!—went cat-like up Roy's steps. Joe well knew that stealthy tread—*Dick had come!*

CHAPTER XVI

POLICEMAN MURPHY CATCHES A BURGLAR

FOR a moment Joe could hardly catch his breath. Dick was *there*—breaking into Roy's home. What should he *do*? What *should* he do? Although he had been thinking about this very thing for hours, yet now it was actually happening it seemed a gigantic impossibility! A soft, grating noise—that was Dick opening the front door with a jimmy. Oh, why couldn't he think what to do! What to do?—why, *prevent* him, of course.

Joe tumbled out of the box and dashed up the steps of the house. He would stop Dick—tell him, threaten him, *make* him stop. When Joe reached the top—no Dick was there. One of the double front doors stood open; and the inner door stood open just a finger's width.

Dick—*had got in—was in*—getting the diamonds—*now!* Should he run in with a shout and alarm the house—and betray him? Dick would say he was Joe's brother—could Joe deny it? Dick would get arrested—there would be a heavy fine—Mr. Darby would have to pay that fine, and it would be Joe's fault! Sis's money would have to go! Should he give a peal on the doorbell to

frighten Dick and make him come out? Should he stand there and shout for help?

For an instant Joe hesitated—and in that hesitation lost all choice. Before he could make up his mind to do anything, Joe heard Dick's returning footsteps, and saw through the glass the occasional gleam of Dick's pocket flashlight.

The front door swung open, and they stood face to face.

"Dick!" cried Joe, appealingly.

"Joe!" exclaimed Dick; and his face went white. "What are you here for?"

"To stop you—you mustn't rob *them*. Give me the diamonds and I'll put 'em back. You mustn't—you *mustn't!*" Joe clung to Dick to keep him there.

Dick muttered an angry oath, and gripped Joe in his turn.

"You fool!—now listen, you. Shut up—we'll let you in on this. Half my share—"

"No, no; give it up—give 'em back—"

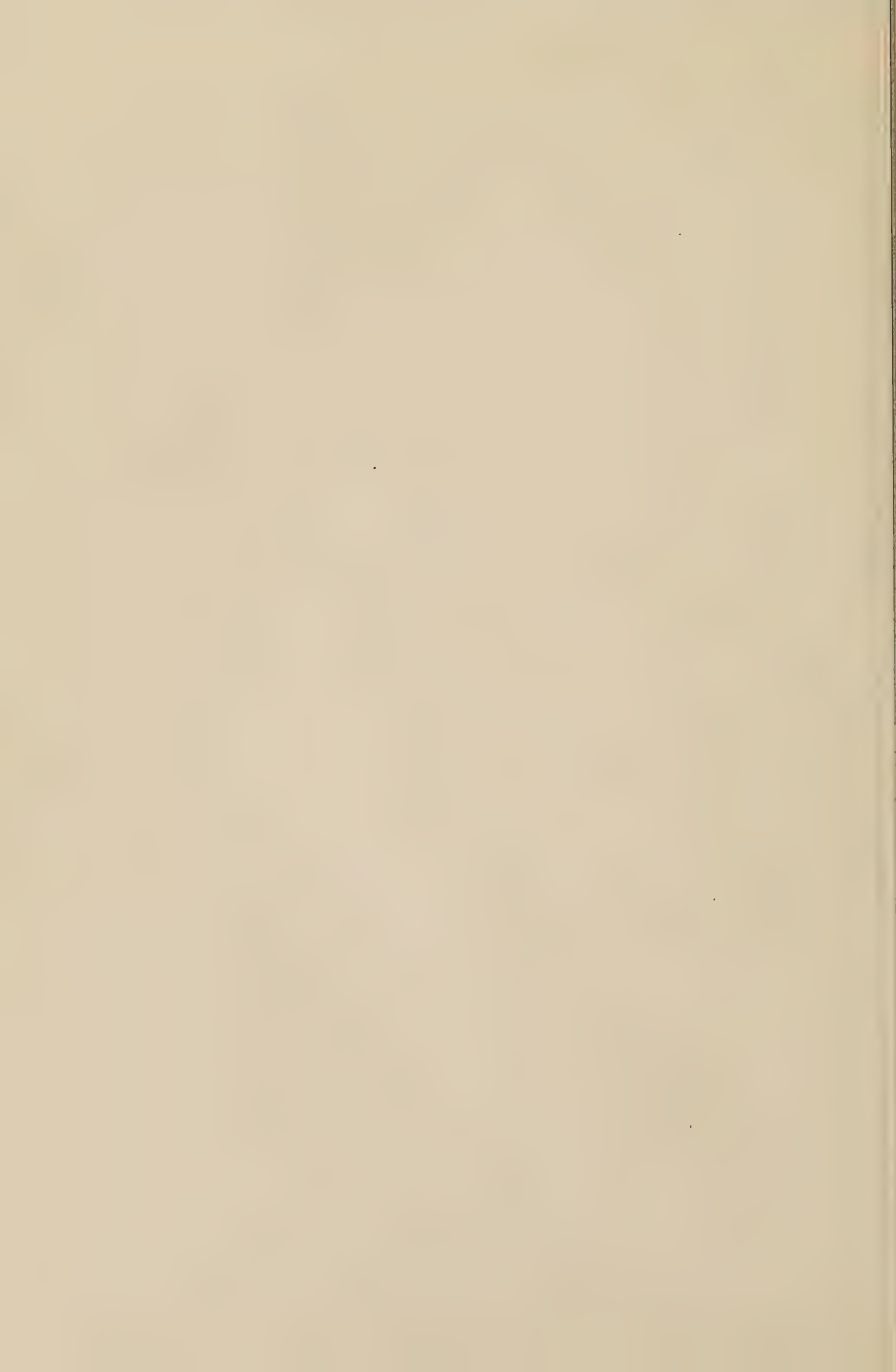
"But if you squeal—we'll do for you, all right. Let go—we'll be caught. . . . If I'm sent up, you'll go, too—" panted Dick, as they struggled in the narrow vestibule. "Do you want to get us both pinched? They're awake up there!"

In the struggle, Joe struck against something in Dick's outside pocket: something hard and small and square. He knew that square box well. If he could only take it from Dick and let him go—



Dick dropped the box.

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but in trying to do this, he forgot what Dick wanted to do. The first thing he knew Dick had wrenched free and went tearing down the steps. Joe followed. A police whistle shrilled above their heads. Dick ran down the street, Joe after. For a block Joe kept right behind him. Then he began to gain on him, inch by inch. Dick put one hand in his pocket. What was he doing? Was he drawing a pistol?

"Take it," he shrieked back at Joe over his shoulder; and he flung a ring right at Joe's feet.

Joe stopped to pick it up—it would take only a second. Dick was getting winded now; cigarettes aren't good training for chases of this kind. There were shouts behind them, too. Those folks would help Joe catch him. Joe gained, inch by inch.

Then Dick dropped the box itself. It struck on its corner—split open—and the three other rings rolled in as many different directions.

Joe didn't care now about catching Dick. He had the rings, now. Could he get them back without any one's knowing—

"Ye'll come with me, young gintleman," said a voice at his ear. A heavy hand clutched him beyond hope of escape; and Joe looked up into the face of a brawny policeman. Four or five other people came up now, and made an excited circle around the boy and his captor.

Joe looked about hopelessly. Just what had

happened? Why did they look at *him* so triumphantly? Why had they stopped chasing Dick? But then, Dick was his brother. Let him get away if he could. Joe needn't explain their relationship to these people. And ever after, couldn't he just have Dick in his power!

"An' I'm thinkin' those pretty-boys wad be safher wid me." The policeman plucked the box from Joe's nerveless hands. "We'll go back to th' s'ane of opyrrations, so to shpake, if ye'll give us th' pleasure of y'r company."

At the significant grin which went round the circle at these mocking words, Joe roused himself. "What are you going to do—with me?" he faltered. Then the truth dawned. "I'm not—arrested?" he cried, stopping short.

"That's not a p'int f'r th' likes o' yez t' arrgy," answered the officer, pulling him onward. Then, as Joe, still stupefied with the shock, pulled back and would not move on, he stopped.

"If wan of yez gintlemen wud kindly put him hand in me pocket, and pull out th' silver bracelets that I frequently carry f'r to admire. They're not as valyble as diamond rings, young feller, but they're th' best in th' line o' jewelry thot I kin offer. Thanks, sorr. On his right and my left. Thank yez kindly."

It had taken but a moment for one of the on-lookers to snap one bracelet of the handcuffs on Joe's right wrist, and the other on the policeman's

left. Back they marched, then to the scene of the burglary.

The quiet block had been transformed. Lights shone in many windows; heads were sticking out of others, and voices called out in question. On Roy's sidewalk a crowd was collected, and was being kept back by the industrious efforts of another policeman.

"Good work, Murphy," this individual called to Joe's captor.

There were murmured comments all through the throng.

"Hillo, they've caught him—"

"Why, he's just a boy!"

"Doesn't he look scared, poor boy!"

"Scared! Aw, he's a tough little nut!"

Joe's cheeks were burning; and he was glad when his policeman led him up the steps and into the house.

Into the parlor they went. Here the whole family was assembled, in an excited company, most curiously arrayed in the first garments they had chanced to seize. They were all talking excitedly till the policeman and his captive appeared, when a sudden silence ensued.

Then Mrs. Manners gave a horrified shriek when she saw it was Joe.

"Why, what in the world!—What are you doing here? *Joe Darby!*" she exclaimed. "Officer, you've made some mistake."

Mr. Manners, a dried-up, bird-like little man whom Joe had never seen before, stood lifting his bare feet alternately, like an excited cat. He pricked up his ears when Mrs. Manners spoke, and, losing his eyeglasses from his nose,

“Is it—er—that boy?” he asked in a nervous voice.

“Mother—did you say Joe was here? What for?” asked Roy, with a puzzled face that blindness made pathetic.

The policeman listened impatiently.

“Phwat? Do yez know him?” he asked in surprise.

“Know him! I should say so,” cried Mrs. Manners, tearfully. Joe didn’t see what she had to cry about. Mr. Manners started to speak, but lost off his eyeglasses again, and subsided.

“Well, who is he?” demanded Policeman Murphy.

Mrs. Manners wrung her hands.

“He’s the boy that was the guide for my son, here, who is blind; and came and studied with him every day.”

Was the guide, Joe noticed. Of course they wouldn’t want Dick’s brother—a thief’s brother—any more. If he’d only let Dick rob them without trying to prevent it, he thought bitterly, they’d never have known. Joe hung his head in despair.

The officer gave the boy a shake.

"Do yez own up to what the lady says?" he asked Joe.

"Yes—I'm his guide—*was* his guide," he amended, in a voice he hardly knew for his own.

Mrs. Manners sobbed into her lace handkerchief. "It can't be! Why, he's been in and out of the house every day—left alone with Roy—and I've trusted him—why, I've even *shown* him my diamonds, and we talked about how much they were worth."

"Did yez, now, mum?" asked the policeman, a bit contemptuously. "Well; what have ye got to say about yersilf, me bhoy?"

Joe started. He remembered only too well, the day they had talked about those diamonds and their value—after *he* had found them.

"Nawthin'," he muttered, and looked sullenly away.

"O-oh! Joe Darby! Why don't you deny it, if you can!" wailed Mrs. Manners, rapidly working herself into hysterics. "Oh, he doesn't deny it. To think that my boy—my poor, helpless, blind boy—has been under *his* influence for *months*!"

She flung a protecting arm around Roy, who stood listening with a puzzled face.

"Mother—" he began, questioningly. But she silenced him.

"Don't say a word, my poor deluded boy. Norah—take Roy upstairs."

Roy flushed crimson. "I'm not a baby," he

protested. "I'll go up if you want me to," he said, with a dignity that a combination of an India shawl and pajamas failed to sustain. "But what's all this about Joe? *Is* Joe here? And *why* is he here?"

"*Will* you go upstairs like a dear boy, and mother will tell you all about it later. Norah, go up with him and heat some water for peppermint."

Norah took Roy's arm with the air of a protecting army. "To think of the times I've made cocoa an' lunches for the likes of *him*—the villain!" she muttered indignantly, as she swept Roy out of the room.

"Have yez missed anything?"

"My jewel-box—four diamond rings. The very ones he knew about, they were. I had left the box on the bureau."

"Well, mum, I have the happiness to inform yez they are safe." (*I saved them, thought Joe, with a pang.*) "Would yez moind describing thim?"

Mrs. Manners described them accurately, while the officer checked her description with the articles themselves.

"'Tis funny there's only three here," he said, when she had finished. "Now, where cud th' fourth be?"

Joe remembered again—three where four should have been. This time he could supply the fourth. With his free left hand he dove into his pocket and

presented it silently to the officer. Maybe then they'd believe—

"Oh, Joe! I trusted you!" cried Mrs. Manners, reproachfully. That hurt more than anything that had happened, thought Joe, with a gulp.

"I shall have to take them to the station-house, ma'am," said the officer. "An' we'll be throublin' yez later t' stip round there t' testify."

"Must I? Oh, dear! Er—is there anything else I can do for you to-night?"

The policeman almost smiled at the pointedness of her hint to go.

"I'm a-waitin' f'r th' pathrol-wagon now." Joe started desperately at that word. "And thin, young man," concluded Officer Murphy, "I'll be throublin' yez t' take a little ride in me motor-car."

There was a moment's silence, as they waited. Joe wished—how he wished—that his stupid tongue would at least let him protest his innocence. Why had he run, they would ask? To pursue the real thief. How had he happened to be on the spot at the time? That he could not answer; so he might as well keep still. He'd do the same before the magistrate, and let them prove what they would. His work with Roy was gone, so nothing mattered much now.

Clang-clang-clangety-clang! From the street a brazen clamor broke in upon them.

Joe turned white. The patrol wagon had come—*for him!*

CHAPTER XVII

IN COURT

JOE passed through the events of the days that followed as if he were passing through a horrible nightmare. Time and again, he felt himself just on the point of waking; time and again, he found himself centering all his will-power, as one does in a nightmare, on telling himself it *was* only a dream, and that in a moment—only a moment—he would be able to shake himself out of it into the waking world. The stumbling down the Manners steps in the officer's custody—the passing the gaping faces of the crowd that had collected (even as he had done in the past, to watch), the swift, short ride to the station-house—the gruff questions of the sergeant, that he answered mechanically, without knowing what he said—another ride to the Gerry Society, because Joe was not sixteen, and could not be locked up with grown-up prisoners—and the waiting there, till he learned that he was to be brought up before Judge White the next day—oh, yes, he told himself, it was all a dream—it *had* to be a dream. At the last moment, he would wake. He knew he would.

But even in his nightmare, Joe's thoughts would

not keep idle. If it wasn't a dream, hadn't he bungled things beautifully! He couldn't have made them come out worse if he had been deliberately trying. He had not only failed to prevent the robbery, but he had got *himself* taken up as the thief, and let Dick escape to Foley. He had lost—reputation, pal, job, money—and the loss of the money would be a bitter blow to Sis. Why, Joe didn't know whether he'd ever see Sis again. Suppose his father believed Joe guilty—it was quite possible. Suppose he turned him out of the house—as he would have deserved if he had been guilty?

Why hadn't he told his father? His father had been sympathetic. He knew of Dick's greed for those diamonds; he had even warned Joe about it. He would have helped Joe plan. And his plans, whatever they might have been, surely couldn't have come out any more disastrously than Joe's own!

But then, there was no use regretting. *If* it proved not to be a dream—if Joe *didn't* wake up in bed at home and laugh at the whole affair—then he had to plan for the future. Since all was lost, Joe decided on the grim policy of just keeping still, letting them prove what they could or would. He was in the mess now—and it *was* a mess, Joe confessed—well, then, he'd see it through. He'd serve his sentence, whatever it was; he'd never go back home—why should he? No, he'd go 'way off

somewhere, and earn a fortune. Perhaps he'd send lots of money back to Sis, and she'd guess who sent it! But first, before he went—*wouldn't* he lay into Dick and give him what he deserved!

So Joe met the policeman who came to conduct him to the courtroom, even cheerfully. There was just so much to go through before he saw the end of the business; and every bit over made so much less to come.

Joe was led into a room that somehow did not have the grim and forbidding appearance that Joe associated with a court-room. Instead, it seemed to have a warm and friendly and kindly welcome—if a room may be said to give a welcome. Perhaps it was the soothing dim glow from the shaded lights; perhaps it was the warm brown of the polished oak that was everywhere—desks and seats and even floor.

Joe cast a quick look around him. One side of the room was taken up by three rows of high-backed seats for onlookers; but no one occupied them, Joe was thankful to notice. On the next side was a long table, where several clerks sat attending to their duties without the least attention to him. The third side was occupied by the high Judge's desk, before which he was led. And at his side, before the desk, stood Mrs. Manners and Roy, the officer who arrested him, and—Joe's heart gave a thump—his father! Why, he'd lose a day's pay for this, thought Joe. Why couldn't

they have let him alone? And he'd surely take it out of Joe later.

Behind the desk sat the Judge, in his black robe. Just now he was turning to look at a yellow slip of paper that an officer brought in; and Joe stole a long look at him. For the first time—without any reason, and much to his surprise—the boy felt a thrill of hope. This man looked as if he might understand.

He had a square face, kindly but firm. He wouldn't stand any nonsense, Joe felt; but he couldn't help thinking a queer thought that followed: "If he has any boys, bet he's the jolliest kind of pal to them in all their fun!" Joe couldn't help looking at him again. He just liked to.

But suddenly the Judge turned as if he guessed. He met Joe's eyes with a look that was both kindly and keen. Then he referred to a paper he held in his hand. "You are Joe Darby?" he asked; and his voice was as kindly-keen as his eyes.

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

Then he asked Joe his age, and where he was in school. *School*, everywhere he went!

"Now, officer, you arrested this boy?" The policeman assented. "Tell us the whole story."

The officer stepped up onto a small platform beside the Judge's desk. Behind it Joe noticed a stenographer, ready to take notes.

The officer was sworn; then he sat down in the

chair in front of the stenographer's desk and began.

He was standing at the southeast corner of Such-and-Such Streets, at about one o'clock. He was looking toward the west, watching a suspicious character on the next block. For that reason he was keeping out of sight. Suddenly he heard a policeman's whistle, and footsteps of some one running, coming from the eastward, and, turning, he saw two people running. They were running towards the west, and turned the corner and went north. He ran after them and caught one. It was this boy. He had a jewel-case in his hands when he caught him. Then he took him back in the direction from which he had come, and found several people gathered in front of this lady's house. He learned afterwards that she had blown the whistle. He asked another officer, whom he found there, and learned there had been a burglary. He had gone in, with the boy, and the lady had at once identified the boy as one who had been the guide to her boy who was blind, and who had known about the lay of the house and about her diamonds. She had identified the jewels as hers. Then he took the boy to the station-house.

"You saw *two* people running?" asked the Judge.

"Yes, your honor."

"Were they running together, or one behind the other?"

"One behind the other. The boy was last. The other feller was at least ten feet ahead."

"What was this person like?"

"Well, I didn't see him clearly; but I'd say positively he was an older chap than this one—quite a man grown. He disappeared all of a sudden, while I was catching this one. This chap might have got away, too, for they had a good start of me, but he stopped to pick up something he dropped."

"You saw him drop something?"

"Well, no, sir. I couldn't have seen it at that distance; but twice he stopped to pick up something; the last time he fumbled around about it considerable, too. Then I came up to him, and found the jewel-case, with three rings, right in his hands. There was a ring missing, I found later at the lady's house; but this boy had it in his pocket."

"You searched him for it?"

"No, your honor, he pulled it out himself."

"Why, that's very queer. . . . Then the only proof that he committed the robbery is the fact that he was running, that you found the jewels in his hand when you caught him; that the jewels had been stolen; and that the lady identified him as a boy who had been in the house a good deal, and who knew about the jewels. Purely circumstantial evidence?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Now, Joe, what have you to say to this?" The magistrate turned to Joe, much to the lad's surprise. He didn't think he'd have a chance to say anything.

"Nawthin'," muttered Joe.

"Have you anything to add to what the officer says?"

"No, sir."

"He's told it just as it was?"

"Ye-es." Joe simply couldn't help saying it slowly. At that moment he felt that he wanted to tell the judge all about it. But then, it wouldn't do any good. Let them prove what they wanted to; it didn't matter.

"Why did you hesitate just then?" asked the judge.

Joe shrugged his shoulders, recklessly.

"This officer saw you running, behind another person?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"Where were you running from?"

"Where he says," muttered Joe, gruffly.

"Do you mean from Mrs. Manners' house, or simply from the direction he saw you?"

"From that direction."

"Not from Mrs. Manners' house?"

"No, sir." That had slipped out before he realized it. He hadn't meant to bring on a discussion as to whether he had committed the robbery. That, he had felt till now, was as good as settled.

“Where had you started to run?”

Joe was silent. The Judge looked at him a moment, then began again with just as kind a voice as if Joe hadn’t defied him.

“Who was this other person?”

Joe was silent.

“You knew him, then?”

Joe flushed. They’d get the truth out of him in spite of him. Much good it would do *him*—as far as Roy and Sis’s money were concerned. What a lot of bother over nothing! But Joe nodded.

“Why were you running after him?”

Joe was again silent.

“Which one of you dropped the things that you picked up?”

Joe was so startled at the keenness of this question that he looked at the Judge in sheer amazement.

“You, or the other fellow?”

“The—other—feller—”

Here Joe fairly gasped at the things he had revealed without meaning to. Now he hardened his heart; of course the Judge was acting soft and sympathetic to get him to tell things. As he paused just here to think a minute, Joe felt confirmed in his opinion. Wasn’t he planning, right now? The next minute he was thankful, however, to have Mrs. Manners called to testify. Joe watched her curiously. Would she throw him

over, scornfully, as she'd cast away an old glove? Joe listened.

Yes, this boy had been employed by her as guide for her blind son, Roy. On whose recommendation? On that of the principal of his school and his teacher, she answered. (Bet she hated to tell that, thought Joe, as the Judge raised his brows and apparently made a mental note of that fact.) He had come freely into her home, knew the location of the rooms. Yes, she admitted with apparent reluctance (hypocrite, thought Joe) she knew he had noticed her rings. They had talked about them once, and how much they were worth. Here, much to Joe's surprise, she volunteered the whole story of how Joe had found her rings when she had carelessly left them. Again the Judge raised his eyebrows. For the first time Joe began to feel a stirring curiosity as to how it would come out, after all; till that moment he had felt certain. How could they help making him guilty?

Now the Judge turned his attention to Roy.

"This is your son, Roy, who is blind?" he asked, abruptly. She assented; at which the Judge addressed himself to Roy.

"Well, you're a Scout, aren't you? Second-class. In the Lighthouse Troop?"

Roy assented joyfully.

"Is your guide here a Scout, too?"

"No, sir," answered Joe, eagerly. "But Roy

loaned me the *Handbook*, and my father said I might be one, just a little while before—”

“Roy, how long has Joe been your guide?”

“Since about four weeks after school opened.”

“What sort of a guide was he—on your honor as a Scout?”

Roy’s face glowed with earnestness.

“He was the finest guide I ever had,” Roy choked over something for an instant. “He was always there, and always ready, and always cheerful. Judge, I suppose my opinion isn’t worth anything, because I can’t see—but I’ve got to know Joe pretty well, and I—I just know he didn’t do it. I know he—he *couldn’t* have done it! Mother told you about that time Joe found those old rings. If he was that sort, why didn’t he take them then? Isn’t that good proof?”

“But what was Joe doing, then, this night?” asked the Judge. Joe felt vindicated in his opinion. Hadn’t the Judge just made up his mind beforehand? Didn’t that question show it?

Roy flushed with mingled earnestness and confusion. “I haven’t the least idea—and of course it looks bad—to any one who didn’t *know* Joe.” He squared his shoulders. “But in spite of all that, I’d say *Joe didn’t do it!*”

The Judge smiled—pityingly, Joe thought. Then he turned to Joe again:

“How much do you earn as Roy’s guide?” the Judge asked Joe.

"A dollar a week, sir."

"What do you do with the money?"

"Give it to my father."

Mr. Darby made an eager gesture. "No, Judge, 'scuse me f'r interruptin', but that ain't quite right. He does give it to me, but it's to put with the money I'm savin' to send my little crippled girl to the country. I didn't ask him to, neither. He up and offered."

"That right, Joe?" asked the Judge. And Joe nodded.

The Judge played with the paper in his hand for a fraction of a minute. "Go on," he said at last to Mrs. Manners.

Accordingly, Mrs. Manners told the rest of her story, ending with the incident of the fourth ring, the night of the robbery. The Judge turned to Joe.

"This fourth ring was in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it get there? Did you put it there yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

Joe was silent.

"Was it one of those things that the officer speaks of as your picking up as you ran?"

Joe was so startled at the keen question that he answered "Yes, sir," involuntarily.

"Had you dropped it?"

"No, sir." Again Joe answered in spite of himself.

"Why, who did, then?"

But now Joe was silent.

"There's something here we haven't got at," said Judge White, decidedly, with a good deal of impatience. "I'd like to find out about this second person who ran away. For all that the evidence shows, Joe might have been chasing the real thief in order to capture him."

This was such a good guess that Joe looked up, startled. The Judge met his eyes with a look that was questioning, but Joe looked down again.

"Mrs. Manners, have you any suspicion as to any one else who might have known about the stones, and who might have been the thief?"

"Any one else? No; I only wish I did!"

That *sounded* fine, thought Joe; but why was she there testifying against him if she didn't wish to prove him guilty? What hypocrites everybody was, he thought bitterly.

"Mr. Darby; please take the stand."

Mr. Darby did so, without a look at Joe.

"What is your business?"

"Laborer; with the Interurban Construction Company. This is the first day I've missed with them for the ten years I've been with them."

"Er—this boy of yours, Joe, was arrested by the officer at about one o'clock in the morning.

How did he happen to be allowed out on the streets so late at night?"

"I don't know, your honor."

"What do you mean? Didn't you know he was out?"

"No, your honor. He had went to bed early—about eight, I think."

"That was earlier than usual? Why did he do so?"

"Well, Judge, I guess 'twas because I'd gi'n him a good thrashin'."

"What was that for?"

"I—I just don't rightly know, now I stop to think it out; but he sorter made me mad."

"But the officer arrested him at one o'clock, several miles from his home. How do you account for that?"

"Dunno, sir," answered Mr. Darby, helplessly.

"What about it, Joe?" asked the Judge, kindly.

"Oh, I got up again," Joe answered wearily.

"When?"

"After they were all asleep."

"Then you didn't go to sleep at all?"

"No, sir."

"Was it because you knew you were going out that night, after the others had gone to sleep and wouldn't hear?"

Joe nodded.

"What were you going out for?"

No answer.

“To rob Mrs. Manners?”

“No, sir,” Joe answered vehemently.

“What for, then?”

The Judge waited a moment for Joe’s reply; then turned to Mr. Darby. “Tell all you can remember of your going to bed that night.”

“Joe, here, went first of all. Then the little girls. Then my wife put little Johnny to bed—he has a crib in Joe’s room. Joe wuz awake then, f’r she spoke to ’im. Then wife and I, we sat in the kitchen and talked.”

“Alone?”

“No, sir. Dick was there, too.”

At Dick’s name, Joe couldn’t suppress a start and a nervous glance at the Judge. He found Judge White was watching him intently.

“Who is Dick?” he asked Mr. Darby.

“My oldest boy.”

“What does he do?”

“Dick! Dick don’t work,” snorted Mr. Darby, scornfully.

“How old is he?”

“Twenty-one.”

“How does he get his living? Twenty-one, and doesn’t work! Does he live on you?” Mr. Darby nodded. “But where does he get money for his own little expenses. Do you give it to him?”

“He makes some, himself, sometimes. I don’t

know how." Mr. Darby shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, go on. What was Dick doing while you were talking with your wife in the kitchen?"

"He was looking at a book."

"What kind of a book?"

"A sort of a catalog."

"Catalog of what?"

"A jeweler's catalog."

"Oh; so he's interested in jewelry, is he?"

"He's always been fond of it."

"Doesn't own much?"

"Oh, no, your honor."

"Doesn't have any money to buy it with, according to your account?"

"He might have. Sometimes he has money. I think he gambles."

"Go on. When did you and Mrs. Darby retire?"

"Jest as th' clock struck ten. I wuz tired, an' I haf to get up early."

"Then you left Dick in the kitchen, looking over the catalog?"

"But he went to bed pretty soon after. I called to him, an' he came before I went to sleep. He sleeps in the room with Joe, and ours is next. So I heard."

"Joe, did you hear Dick go to bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he know you were awake?"

"Guess not!" Joe grinned.

“You didn’t want him to know, did you?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not?”

But Joe was silent again.

“I want this Dick called as a witness. Where is he?”

“He hain’t been home—I ain’t laid eyes on him—sence that night.”

“What!” exclaimed the Judge. “What steps have you taken to locate him?”

“None. He’s of age. He’s often away like that for a week.”

“Do you know where he goes?”

“No, sir, nor I don’t care. He’s given me enough trouble. I don’t care what becomes of him.”

The Judge pondered a moment. “What do you mean when you say he’s given you trouble? Was he bad as a boy?”

“Bad! As bad as a bad egg!”

“When did you see him last?”

“That night was the last time I ever seen him.”

“You didn’t see him the next morning?” Mr. Darby shook his head. “Then he must have gone away before you got up. What time did you get up that morning?”

“Five o’clock. When I went through their room, both boys was gone.”

The Judge stopped his questions for a moment, while he summoned a court officer, wrote some-

thing on a piece of paper, and gave it to the officer. "I want that record," Joe heard him say.

Then the Judge turned to Joe. What a lot of patience it took to be a Judge, Joe was thinking; and what a head, to carry all the things that different people said, and sift them out. Joe almost believed this Judge would get to the bottom of things in spite of him. He almost wished he would. Of course, Roy's mother would still object to having a thief's brother as guide for her precious Roy; but it would prove Roy was right in his defense of Joe. After all, it *would* be better not to be proved a thief: for his father's sake—for Sis! Joe answered the Judge's next questions almost willingly.

"Did Dick get up and go out *before* you did, that night, or after?" was the staggering question of this astute judge.

Joe looked down. Then he straightened up as if a load were lifted from his shoulders. "Before," he answered.

"He dressed very quietly, I suppose, so as not to wake you?"

"Guess he did!"

"What did he do then, after he had dressed?"

"Went out."

"How do you know?"

"I heard him unbolt the kitchen door, and then close it."

"Then *you* dressed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Immediately after?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he in sight when you went out into the street?"

"No, sir."

"Where did you think he was going?"

Joe was silent.

"Did you know?"

Joe looked up into the Judge's eyes. "I—knew," he said, taking a deep breath.

"Tell us what you knew," continued the Judge, kindly. But Joe was silent again. He couldn't bring himself to "peach on Dick," he thought.

"Did Dick know you knew where he was going?" Joe shook his head. "Where did you go then?"

Joe looked down, without speaking.

"Did you then go to the vicinity of Roy's home?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

Joe kept his eyes down and made no answer.

"To rob Mrs. Manners?"

Now Joe looked up, quickly. "No, sir," he answered, earnestly.

"But why should you go there, then? To meet Dick?"

Joe heaved a sigh. He felt his eyes begin to smart as if tears were coming. Why—*Why* did

they want to worry one poor boy like that? Why couldn't they "put him away" without all that bother to themselves, and torment to Joe. So many against one! He fumbled in his pocket for his handkerchief.

Mr. Darby leaned forward in the witness chair. "Judge," he said, in a voice that was hoarse with earnestness, "I don't believe my Joe there ever done it. Judge, he's a good boy—he goes to school steady, and brings home fine reports; then after school he works all afternoon with this blind feller, an' then comes home, and studies after supper till bedtime. He gives all the money he makes to Sis. Sis thinks the world o' Joe, an' he does o' Sis. I dunno what she'd do if Joe got took off. She's most sick now, worryin' about him. Judge—he's a *good* boy—I never want a better!"

And Joe? Joe felt as if the world were turning topsy-turvy. Here was his father pleading vehemently for him—pleading that he was a good boy! If he'd only said so to Joe—if he'd only shown he thought so, when Joe was struggling all by himself—

As if that were not enough, Mr. Darby went on, "An' I've a notion, Judge, Joe here knew Dick was goin' to—do it, an' went t' stop him. Warn't that so, Joe?"

Joe looked down.

"An' I've a notion that wuz what wuz troublin'

Joe the night I thrashed him f'r bein' so mumpin'. Warn't that so, too, Joe?"

At this point the officer whom the Judge had sent on an errand came back with the slip of paper. The Judge read it; then his eyebrows went higher than they had at anything that had come out in the trial.

"I'm going to tell you both something you don't know. . . . Dick Darby was arrested day before yesterday for breaking into a store; and he has confessed to this robbery of Mrs. Manners' house. So you can be as frank as you please, Joe, without feeling that you are betraying your brother Dick—though that's a foolish feeling about a law-breaker."

Joe heaved a big sigh of relief, and clenched his hands. The whole room was whirling round. He *hadn't* done it, and they all knew now. He *wasn't* a thief. This time the tears came as far as his eyes. He couldn't look at his father, or the smiling Judge, or even the excited Mrs. Manners. He felt he had never known such utter happiness as the happiness of that moment. And the next minute he was telling the whole story, without hesitation, with his father throwing in a corroborative word now and then.

But the Judge had not quite finished.

"Well, Joe, I'm glad for your sake that things came out as they did. But I don't think you've

been punished any too severely for the fool things you've done."

Joe stared at the Judge in amazement. When he met his stern eyes, he even felt uneasy. The Judge's reverberating voice, as he leaned forward to address Joe, made Joe almost afraid. He was glad he wasn't guilty, to have to meet those piercing eyes and hear that stern address. For the Judge did not spare him.

"I wonder if you've realized just how foolish you have been. Why didn't you tell your father when you learned what Dick was planning? Wasn't it his *right* to know? What right had you to keep it from him? And what in the world possessed you to try to stop Dick alone? That wasn't your job. That was for the officer or the detective to do. That's what they're for. What made you think you could do what we have to spend a lot of time training a real detective to do? You found out by experience that it was too big a job for you, didn't you; you made a pretty big mess out of things, didn't you? Your foolishness cost Mrs. Manners, and Roy, and your father a lot of worry and trouble. People don't think much of other people who tackle jobs that are too big for them, because they don't know enough to know it."

It wasn't his words so much as his manner, that made Joe feel small enough to sink through a crack in the floor, and foolish enough to wish he could

do it. Joe had faced his father's violent anger more than once; but Mr. Darby had never made him feel the way this Judge did, with his piercing blue eyes and his earnest voice. Yet in spite of its accusing, it was at bottom friendly; so it didn't make Joe rebellious, only ashamed enough to drop through the floor. But he went on:

"That's foolishness the first—not trusting your father; not telling him what was his right to know; and thinking you could do a detective's work in stopping Dick. You did something still worse—worse than mere foolishness. What in the wide world made you take upon yourself the crime Dick committed, and let yourself be proved guilty of it? Do you know, young man, that things looked pretty bad for you, one while? That you pretty nearly *did* get proved guilty of it?"

Here Joe couldn't help looking up. Goodness knows, he thought, I didn't do it because I *wanted* to—

The Judge understood his look perfectly. "Oh, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking it was a splendid piece of heroic self-sacrifice. You're thinking it was a piece of loyalty to your brother. Now, loyalty *is* a splendid thing, Joe; we need every atom of it that we can get, in a country like this. Yes, loyalty is splendid; but loyalty to the *wrong thing* isn't splendid; it's merely foolish. I want you to think about this. You were being loyal to your brother,

—yes. But that brother was himself being *disloyal*—to you, to his father, to the law of the land. There is more than one thing that we all have to be loyal to, Joe; our family, our religion, our country. Suppose sometime we're placed as you were, so that being loyal to one means disloyal to another? We've got to choose, then. Or, put it another way: suppose being loyal to Dick consists in helping Dick be disloyal to something bigger—to the laws of his country—to the right? Is it *really* being loyal to *him* to help him be disloyal to something bigger? You were shielding Dick in being disloyal to his country; in doing it you were no better than he. You were helping a law-breaker—and by just so much you were breaking the law yourself: no real Scout would do that! You're a fine, loyal lad, Joe; and by just so much you've got to keep that loyalty untarnished."

Joe fairly slunk out of court when the case was concluded. He noticed Mrs. Manners and Roy lingered as if to speak to him on the way out; but Joe kept on the other side of his father, and Mr. Darby was in a hurry to get back to work. So they emerged into the street without exchanging a word. Joe wanted it that way. How could he ever face any one who had heard him receive such a thorough "dressing-down" as the Judge had given him?

CHAPTER XVIII

AT WORK

JOE and his father walked out of the white building together, and turned towards home. How bright the sunshine seemed, and how clear the air was! Joe didn't want to talk; and they went along in silence. He tingled with shame at the "talking-to" the Judge had given him. But, above all, he felt shy of this new-found father of his, who had defended him so lustily; and he was almost afraid this state of affairs would not last. It was too good to last. None of Joe's good-fortunes ever lasted. Yet there was one, he felt, that would; for he felt he could never again be afraid of his father. Four months ago, that was almost the only feeling that father inspired.

A big clock boomed above their heads. Joe started.

"Why, you've had to stay away from work—" he exclaimed.

"I should worry," responded Mr. Darby, cheerfully. "I had somethin' more important to do, didn't I?"

Joe dropped his eyes.

"S'pose you'll be home early this afternoon?" said Mr. Darby, plunging into the very topic they both were thinking about.

Joe was so glad his father had mentioned it! He wanted to talk certain things over with him.

"Yes. S'pose so. *That's* done with," answered Joe. "I care more about Sis—" he added.

"Yes. She's added up that money more'n a million times already. It would just have made enough to send her away."

"Dad," began Joe—it was the first time in his life he had ever called him by that name—"I don't care about school, now. I want to work. You need me—and Sis needn't lose her vacation. Don't they need a boy where you are?"

"Dunno but they do. Want to begin to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-day," answered Joe, eagerly.

"I'm a-goin' back for the rest of the day. I'll speak to Red Mike, the boss, and then ter-morrer ye can go with me. Tell y'r ma t' git out that brown shirt o' mine that shrunk; and there's an extra pair of overalls. Guess you c'n fill 'em."

Joe's heart swelled. He was going to be a real workman, wear his father's workman's clothes—rough shirt and overalls—and carry a tin dinner-pail. But best of all, he was going to escape from the tangled snarl he had made of affairs, and begin afresh amid new surroundings.

Joe had his hands full that afternoon telling his

mother, Sis, and the little girls all that had happened since he shut the door on himself at the beginning of his great adventure. How differently it had come out from what he expected.

But even with their innumerable questions time dragged heavily. He was so anxious to begin work. It was such a long wait from noon-time till half-past five, when Mr. Darby would come home.

Part of the time was taken up in trying on the shirt and overalls, and posing before the mirror. Joe thrust up the brown sleeves and clenched his hand, to admire his muscles. Then his clothes were laid carefully on a chair in his room, ready for morning.

Joe waited anxiously for his father's return. Suppose, after all, there was no place for him?

"Did you ask—do they want me?" he demanded, before Mr. Darby had closed the door.

"Thought mebbe ye'd changed your mind by this time," teased Mr. Darby. "Yes. Begin to-morrer."

There was no sound sweeter to Joe's ears than the alarm-clock's noisy din the next morning; and no day seemed quite so pleasant, as when Joe and his father went forth, dinner-pails in hand, to work.

"There's Red Mike, the boss," pointed out Mr. Darby, as they joined a group of other overalled workmen, waiting for the seven o'clock whistle.

Joe saw a six-foot, red-faced, red-haired giant, with the biggest arms Joe ever saw, standing easily on a narrow girder, and shouting directions in a tremendous voice to somebody half a block away. Joe watched him, fascinated, for the next ten minutes, as he stood, the master of all this confusion, roaring orders, seeing all ways at once, hearing a dozen questions at a time, and taking short cuts over the tangle of foundation stones and girders that fairly took Joe's breath away. Would *he* ever learn to move easily over a five-inch path with a drop of twenty feet below, carrying a ten-foot timber on his shoulder?

Suddenly Red Mike moved over near them.

"Here's my boy I spoke to you about," began Mr. Darby.

"Hey? Oh, all right." Red Mike gave Joe one glance. "He's a good husky chap, f'r a lad. I'll put him helper f'r ould Jim, and runnin' errands f'r me. Here's a helper f'r yez, Jim," he roared, to some one beyond the confusion. "What's y'r name, bhoy?"

"Joe, sir." Joe liked the direct, business-like way these men had of coming to the point of things at once.

"Well, Joe, you come wid me."

A teamster interrupted Red Mike by backing his wagon up to the wrong place. Mike was off like a shot. Joe hadn't quite located Old Jim, whose helper he was to be. He asked the nearest man.

“D’ye see that engine over there?” The man pointed across a tangle of emptiness, crossed by lines of masonry and plank pathways crisscrossed here and there. “He’s thot mon with the—”

Red Mike suddenly appeared at Joe’s side. “Now, Joe, this way. Come wid me.” And he started across the single plank that led across a ten-foot drop below.

Joe hesitated just one second. Red Mike evidently expected him to follow. If Mike and all the rest of the men could cross those narrow paths with unconcern—*so would he!* And jiminy, he thought as he gained Red Mike’s side a moment later—Does *everything* that’s hard turn easy if you only tackle it?

Red Mike’s blue eyes were smiling. “You’ll do,” he said, shortly. “That’s Jim, with the gray hair.”

Did he know Joe had hesitated, even though for an instant; for he seemed to see everything with those keen blue eyes. Could he have seen it with the back of his head, chuckled Joe?

Jim was a white-haired old man whose duty was to feed the firebox of the donkey-engine used for hoisting. He nodded greetings. He had been a faithful employee for many years, and now he was bent and old, he was given easy jobs and a helper to do the work.

“You’re the eighth boy that’s wanted the job, and the first he’s taken,” said Old Jim. “Thot

was a little test he puts 'em through, an' every one flummoxed."

"What? Follerin' him over?" asked Joe. He thought he had got away from *tests* when he left school.

Old Jim nodded. "Ye see, we can't have men in this construction work that's shaky because there's a hole under 'em."

Now Joe *had* been shaky—was still, he confessed to himself, as Old Jim unconcernedly sent him across another perilous path to get another shovel. But now he'd die rather than acknowledge it. He didn't know that both Red Mike and Old Jim could see that he had this beginner's feeling, knew it would wear off, and thought the better of him for putting it down. Indeed, they both tried to help him by sending him into as many ticklish places as they could. And when Red Mike noticed later that Joe forced himself to take the shakiest ways, on purpose, times when he could have traveled a secure one without criticism, it scored a point in his favor in Red Mike's estimation.

But later in the day he scored a point that he knew about, and that made him ready to stand on his head for Red Mike ever after. And it was through the very last person that would have chosen to do Joe a good turn: no less than—Foley!

During the day Red Mike was continually sending Joe to drive away the children and boys that

persisted in hanging about, much to their peril and much to the hindrance of the workmen. Joe liked this best of anything he had to do.

“Go chase them kids,” Mike would shout to Joe; and Joe would start off with alacrity.

Mike laughed to himself at the boy. For Joe had already begun, unconsciously, to imitate Mike’s own jerky swing of the arm as he waved them away, and Mike’s tone of voice as he ordered them off.

“That’s right. Keep y’r eyes skinned on that pile there,” bade Red Mike. “The kids’ll steal half of it if we don’t watch ’em. Sell it to the junk-men f’r metal.”

So Joe “kept his eye skinned for the kids,” as well as for the hungry red mouth of the engine he had to keep fed, and the supply of coal that must not be allowed to get too low.

Soon after Joe saw three big fellows—about Dick’s age—hanging about that attractive pile of metal. One of them looked like—yes, it *was*—no—yes, Foley! Joe and Mike were both watchful. Mike happened to be near Joe at that time, and Joe looked up from his work in expectation of an order to drive them away.

“Those big chaps know what they’re after. They’ve been hanging round before. You don’t want to tackle *them*, do ye!” Mike laughed at Joe’s evident eagerness.

“Sure,” answered Joe, starting towards the pile

for the tenth time that morning. Mike chuckled to himself. 'Twould do *that* kid good to tackle something that was too much for him, he thought.

Within twenty feet of him Joe caught Foley's eye. Foley started—stared—then said something to his mates, and all three sheered off and began to walk slowly away as if they hadn't seen Joe.

Joe returned. Red Mike stared with down-dropped jaw. "Sure, what did ye say to thim?" he inquired in surprise.

"I didn't say anything," answered Joe.

"Just looked at 'em, hey?" Mike chuckled. "Bhoy, ye be careful ye don't happen t' look at *me* thot way, f'r I'm nayded here, and ye might make me sneak away in the same fashion."

Beneath his brown shirt Joe's heart was thumping. Red Mike *approved* of him—had as much as said so.

Red Mike showed a further interest in Joe that noontime, when the men sat about eating their luncheons. As the youngest member of the gang, Joe was laden with four tin pails and as many ten-cent pieces, and was just starting away to the nearest café when Red Mike came up.

"Where ye goin'?" he demanded, angrily.

Joe thought it was obvious; but told him.

"Put thim cans down," commanded Red Mike. Something had made him very angry. In a second Joe learned what it was.

"Now, thin, bhoys, see here! No gang o'

mine'll iver sind a kid into a gin-mill f'r suds f'r them. Get that? Ye'll answer f'r it t' *me!*" And Mike was so angry that he brandished his clenched fist.

Joe felt foolish. So he was only a kid to Red Mike. He was also disappointed. He had, foolishly enough, thought how manly it would feel to push through those swinging half-doors, walk up to the polished bar, and put his foot on the shining brass rail as he waited his order. Only a kid—to be taken care of! But after all, it showed Red Mike was thinking of him; and not only thinking, but willing to take a moment from his busy day for his sake. To Joe's intense surprise, Mr. Darby, joining the group, added his emphatic,

"Y'r right, Mike."

When Joe looked at his father questioningly he said, in a low aside to Joe,

"Dick began that way."

"Oh!" said Joe, comprehending. And he wished now there was some way he could thank Red Mike for his interest. But all he could do was to work lustily all afternoon, and answer Red Mike's summons with lightning speed.

"Y'r just out o' school, ain't ye?" came Red Mike's voice at his elbow, when Joe, toiling vigorously, thought he was a hundred feet away. Joe started. *School*, again, he thought.

"Yes, sir," he answered, dispiritedly.

"Where was ye in school?"

"1-B,—second term in the high school."

"Come wid me. I want ye to check a list."

Joe followed Mike into his sanctum—a tiny office built in the street, and painted bright blue. Mike took a long bill from a hook.

"Rade that, an' check if I say so," he commanded.

Item by item Joe read the long list of building materials. Most of the time Mike nodded, with a "Check thot." "Check—check—" went on Red Mike, checking apparently from memory. "Check—no, wan hundred bags was delivered, *not* wan-twinty. Put down wan hundred."

Joe wondered why Mike needed *him* just to read those items and make a check mark; for Mike was checking from his head. Maybe—at last Joe felt sure—*Mike couldn't read!* Red Mike! The man that kept the whole gang working, who knew everything about everything! Didn't it just *show* how little important school was? Men like Red Mike, who really did things, didn't need it! During the rest of the time, he watched Red Mike intently. He was surprised, however, to look up at the conclusion of his work there, and find Red Mike staring at him.

" 'Tis a pity yez had t' lave school," remarked Mike. "What was it—git into a mess and have to lave it?"

This was so near the truth that Joe turned red and wouldn't answer. He was glad somebody

came up just then and made Red Mike's presence more necessary elsewhere.

"Tired, kid?" asked Mr. Darby, as they started homeward.

"Naw!" responded Joe, scornfully. As a matter of fact, every muscle of his body was protesting vigorously at the violent change from sitting still in school to the strenuous activity of even a "helper." But he wouldn't have acknowledged it, even to himself.

"Goin' back again?" asked Mr. Darby.

"You bet!" answered Joe.

"I want Joe—just as he is," called Sis, the moment she heard the door slam behind them.

"Can't I wash first?" laughed Joe.

"No; I want to see you, dirt and all, just as you work."

So Joe went in and stood before her, proud and happy; of his man's clothes, grimed with the dirt of a man's work. To his surprise her lips trembled ominously.

"Oh, Joe—you're so—*different*, somehow! You're not Joe at all—you're a stranger that I don't know."

"I'm the same old chump, Sis; I'm just growin' a bit, that's all," protested Joe.

"But, Joe," her voice was very pleading, "I've always *lost* my big brothers when they grew up. I—I *can't* lose *you*, Joe. Oh, I don't *want* you to grow up into a man!"

"Him—a man?" Mr. Darby's chuckle sounded beside them. "He'll have to fill out considerable, and learn a whole lot, before then. Hey, Joe?" And he engaged in a friendly tussle with his son that delighted both Joe and Sis. "Any time he thinks he's a man, just let him come and ask me," he laughed.

"Well, Sis," said Joe, earnestly, after Mr. Darby had gone, "I'm going to be the exception that proves the rule. Don't you want to go on with that story to-night? You'll really have me more, you see, because I won't have to study evenings."

"How soon is it due? I would like to finish it."

"Due? Jiminy, I forgot." He opened to the back, where a paster announced that it was the property of the City High School.

"Not due for three days. But how'll I ever return it? I'm busy through the day—have to mail it, I guess."

But despite his denials, Joe *did* feel different. He did feel as though he had suddenly jumped over two or three years of life. It wasn't just his pride in his working-clothes, or in the comradeship of his father or the commendation of Red Mike. But something had happened to him. He felt different—more responsible, more serious. And he felt happy—utterly happy, but with a queer, quiet kind of happiness that he felt sure was going to last.

CHAPTER XIX

RED MIKE'S ADVICE

“**M**ISS SCOTT'S been here,” said Joe's mother, as he and his father came home several days later.

“Miss Scott—who's she?” asked Mr. Darby.

“My class teacher,” answered Joe. “What did she want?”

“She says you've got to get working-papers if you stay out to work. But she wants you to come back. Sis can tell you more. They talked together a long time.”

Joe had instantly felt a sudden hope that he would have tidings from Roy. Then he checked himself sharply. Why should he? And why should he care? No; Miss Scott had come only about those old working-papers. Now he had to go back to school to get them. He didn't want to set foot inside those doors again.

“Would ye go back, Joe?” asked Mr. Darby with curiosity as the boy waited, lost in thought, for his turn at the roller towel.

“No,” said Joe gruffly.

But nevertheless, he made haste to clean up and go in to Sis. Her eyes were shining when he came in.

"Guess who's been here!" she challenged.

"Miss Scott," he answered promptly.

"Oh, ma told you. Well, what else do you know?"

"Only that she doesn't want me to leave school."

"That all?"

"That's all ma said."

Sis suppressed an excited wriggle.

"I like Miss Scott," she said.

"Of course. Is that news?"

"Didn't you?"

"Well, I guess. It was she that—" Joe checked himself. He had almost spoken Roy's name.

"Yes, I know. And Joe—what's the very—nicest—thing that might possibly happen?"

"I might take you for an aeroplane ride in my 1950 model," replied Joe. He thought immediately of Roy, but wouldn't have mentioned his name for a million dollars.

"I mean *really*," she said, hoping Joe would say what she knew he was thinking. But he refused to guess, and at last she had to say,

"There's some one wants to see you awful bad. Guess who?"

"Miss Scott." Joe always guessed wrong to please her.

"No—well, she does, of course, but that isn't the one."

"Dr. Cunningham."

"Wrong. Some one in your class."

"John Bartlett. He borrowed five cents he never returned."

"No, no, silly."

"Simon Katz. He owes me a punch for one I gave him because he teased—" Joe's jaw shut together tight.

"You're stupid. No, you're playing stupid. Guess now, an honest, truly guess." But Joe wouldn't speak Roy's name for fear he might be wrong, after all.

"R," prompted Sis.

Joe shook his head.

"O, Y," she finished, looking up in delight.

To her surprise Joe's face hardened. "What does *he* want of *me*?" he muttered.

"Why, Joe, he just *wants* you. He hasn't any guide now. I s'pose he wants you same as I would. Just think where I'd be if you deserted *me*."

"I didn't *desert*," interrupted Joe, hastily. He didn't like that word; and he looked so irritated that Sis changed the subject.

But that word of Sis's—*desert*—and Red Mike's casual "Git into a mess and have to lave it?" bothered Joe at odd times when he had time to think. Now he remembered how Roy had stood up for him, believed in him, even at the trial. Then there came back to him the hundred little ways he and Roy had "fitted together" in doing their work,

and the hundred ways Roy had grown to be dependent on him. Why did they pester him now, when he was well out of that mess, didn't want to think of it again, and was so happy in his work?

Happy was no name for it, Joe thought. Every day he could note how the big building grew, slowly but steadily, under Red Mike's direction. And how he worshiped Red Mike himself—that incarnation of perpetual noise and perpetual motion! Joe even liked to hear the sound of that big voice of his—that voice which could battle successfully against the rattle of derrick-gear and the clatter of the lifting engines.

"Some different, *this* is!" he exulted, at work one day, as he contrasted the swarming hundred-foot lot with the quiet class-room with its boys and girls sitting at their desks in silence, till a bell told them they might stop work and speak. As Joe ran nimbly over a narrow girder, making an old lady on the sidewalk shriek with apprehension, he smiled as he recalled how they marched at school, like sheep, in a meek line through the halls, with monitors to keep them in line.

But Red Mike's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"Look out—git out o' there, you kids," came Red Mike's shout. Joe shut the door of the blazing cavern he had been tending, and looked. A strenuous job, he thought, to feed that hungry fire.

"Hey, Joe! Go chase that gang away," bawled Mike, from twenty feet away. "There's a blind boy with 'em, and he 'll get hurt sure."

At the word Joe dropped his shovel and looked anxiously in their direction. It *was* Roy! At the sight of that familiar figure, Joe's heart softened. Roy had *come to him!*

"Git a move on, Joe," yelled Red Mike, against the rattle of the derrick chains. A boy had been hurt there last week despite Mike's care, so he was doubly watchful now.

Joe dodged through the tortuous way to the sidewalk, where the boys stood. He felt embarrassed at this first meeting—he felt ashamed now of not having gone to Roy; for they had been pals. Was it being a good pal to keep away when your pal had sent for you? Especially as he couldn't come himself.

Even then, Joe shirked a meeting. Ten feet away he stopped, and tried to wave them away with a motion of his arm. They didn't move. So, being under Red Mike's eye, Joe ran nimbly across the narrow iron girder that formed the nearest, but not the safest, path to them.

"You boys get away from there," he ordered. *Maybe* Roy wouldn't recognize his voice.

Maybe! He'd forgotten how quick Roy was, and how eager to see Joe.

"That's Joe himself!" he cried joyfully, as his guide started to lead him away.

Then Joe just had to speak to him. "What are you doing *here*?" he asked, taking Roy by both shoulders.

Roy's grip was so hard that it was painful; for he clutched Joe as if with fear of losing him again.

"What do you suppose? Why didn't you come?"

"Why should I come? Your folks don't want me any more."

"Who said so?" laughed Roy.

"And I've got a job workin' where my father is, so I *can't* come," continued Joe. "I'm never comin' back to school again. I like this."

"Not even if you had your old job back?" ventured Roy, hesitatingly.

"I—like this better," repeated Joe, with a feeling of basely deserting Roy. Yet whose fault was it but his own? But Joe still felt he had made such a dismal mess of things that he couldn't bear to talk to Roy's mother.

"You Joe! I didn't tell yez t' howld an afternoon rayseption wid y'r frinds," Red Mike's eyes seemed to see everything, for the next moment he was bawling at a man fifty yards in the opposite direction.

"I got to go back to work," said Joe, not sorry that Red Mike put a stop to the interview. "He sent me to drive you away from here. It's dangerous."

"That your boss? Isn't he a Tartar, though!"

"No; he's a brick," defended Joe, enthusiastically.

"His head is, anyway," they retorted. But they looked at Joe with awe. They were shy of this loud-voiced boss; but here was Joe praising him.

Roy's brow was puckered as he took one step away.

"That's final, Joe?" he asked wistfully.

"Yes," Joe muttered, sheepishly. Then he ran back and tackled his coal-pile as if he could get away from this thought that way. But he couldn't. For everywhere he looked, he couldn't help seeing Roy's eager, wistful face change its expression as Joe said that last word.

Red Mike had a visitor that afternoon. A well-dressed man, whom Joe summed up as the contractor, stood and talked with him for several minutes.

"Hey! Joe!" Red Mike beckoned Joe to his side the first time he caught the boy's eye. Joe came over wonderingly. Why should the contractor want him?

"Is your name Joe Darby?" asked the man, with a business-like snap in his voice that Joe didn't exactly like.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, looking questioningly from Red Mike to the man.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen." It began to dawn on Joe what was

coming. Miss Scott had "fixed him" about those working-papers.

"Give me the number of your working-papers."

"I—haven't any," faltered Joe.

"You see?" snapped the man, to Red Mike.
"When did you leave school?"

"Last week," mumbled Joe. Couldn't *any one* let him alone! He had been so happy here—more so than he had ever been in school—doing his part, however insignificant, among men who *did* things instead of reading about them. Now they wanted to drag him back to school, where he'd be watched and pestered like a kid!

"Didn't you know you had to have working-papers?" asked the man, sharply.

"I never thought about it," answered Joe, blankly.

"Did he tell you he was sixteen?" the man demanded of Red Mike.

"Sure, he looked so big I never thought o' askin'," said Mike, easily.

"You report in school to-morrow. I'll call them up during the day and see that you've done it. We'll let it pass this once." The man went away, picking his way with a scared, gingerly tread that both Joe and Mike grinned over.

"Sorry, bhoy, I can't let yez back after to-day," said Red Mike. "Sure, I thought yez was over sixteen. It's back t' school f'r yez."

"I'll get my working-papers and come back," answered Joe, savagely.

"Well; y'r job'll be open, son."

But Joe turned to go back to his work with a droop to his shoulders that was not wasted on Red Mike.

"Wait—come back here a minute," cried Red Mike. Joe came, wondering and half-scared. Mike might be angry at Joe's unintentional deception.

"I reckon y'r not likin' it a little bit, hey?" he asked.

"I don't want to go back to school. I like it here," jerked out Joe, sullenly kicking a bit of stone.

"Here's a bit of advice, free-gratis-for-nothing, that ye'll not be after thankin' me f'r, I'm thinkin'. 'Tis a good quick block ye've got on top o' that backbone o' yours. I've been noticin'. Go back to school, and in foive years ye'll be comin' back to boss the likes o' me." Joe gazed at Mike in amazement. Mike stopped to add,

"If ye wuz my boy, I'd *make* ye do it, too." Then he suddenly saw something going wrong in the opposite street, and was no longer there.

Joe went back to his work, thinking hard. It was all right for Sis and Miss Scott and Dr. Cunningham and the truant officer to be cranky about school. Sis didn't know about the real world, and

as for the others, why, school was their business, so of course they thought it important. If they didn't keep kids in school, there wouldn't be any jobs for *them*, was Joe's naïve view!

But here was Red Mike—the efficient boss of all these men, the man whose good word Joe would rather have than that of any one else in the world—here was this big, strong, capable Red Mike *advising* him to stick to school till—it was almost unbelievable—till he “came back to be bossin’ the likes of him!” And he had said, “*If ye wuz my boy, I’d make ye do it!*” Maybe there was something in it, acknowledged Joe. Anyway, he had to go; and Red Mike’s words certainly made him feel better about going.

CHAPTER XX

ROY'S TENDERFOOT

SO the next morning Joe's brown shirt and overalls lay neglected on a chair, while Joe donned again the short knickers that he had been so glad to get rid of. And Joe, instead of going forth with the wage-earners at six-thirty, went, as he thought disgustedly, with the school-kids at eight-thirty.

"Joe, Dr. Cunningham wants to see you in the office," said Miss Scott.

Joe grinned at his own thoughts. "The last time she said that, I was scared stiff for fear they'd kick me out! Now I'm mad because they want to *keep* me. Oh, the whole world's crazy—or else I am!"

Why couldn't they let him come back without any bother, he thought impatiently. That wasn't the way Red Mike did things—always making a fuss over nothing.

Joe was almost tempted to bolt out of that open front door. There were jobs out there—men's jobs, digging and building. There were men out there, on that shining white road that beckoned him away—men that wanted more like themselves;

men like big Red Mike—how Joe adored big Red Mike! But Joe couldn't go to those things—the truant officer would dog his tracks, and do him out of his work as he had done yesterday.

The mental picture of that skinny truant officer, with his eyeglasses and gingerly tread, talking with big Red Mike—an eloquent contrast—recalled Mike's last words to Joe. "You've got a good block on that backbone of yours. Go back to school," he had said, "and in five years you'll be coming back to boss the likes of me." We-ell, thought Joe, slowly. He couldn't believe, for a minute, that Red Mike didn't know what he was talking about. A realization slowly dawned upon him. Why; sitting there in school, he was just that minute where Red Mike, for Joe's own good, would want him to be! Well; he'd stick. He'd show Red Mike that he appreciated his advice.

"Joe Darby; step into the office, please, now," Dr. Cunningham's secretary emerged from the private office.

Joe entered, unwillingly. Dr. Cunningham looked up with his cordial smile, and put out his hand.

"We're very glad to have you back, my boy," he said, as his hand closed warmly over Joe's.

Well, thought Joe, practically; did he send for him just to tell him that? A year ago he would have put that thought into impudent words.

"Sit down and let's talk things over. Did you

come back because you had to, or because you wanted to?" asked the principal.

Joe turned red. "At first—because I had to. But I guess now I want to," he added honestly. What was there about Dr. Cunningham that always made you *want* to tell him everything so he'd understand; and made you feel sure he'd sympathize and help, when he did understand?

"Tell me about it," he said, with his encouraging smile.

So Joe told him everything—about Red Mike and the work Joe liked so. This led to Joe's work with Roy, and why he had given it up. This brought up the trial, and then the arrest. Then Joe had to tell what he *was* doing that night, and about Dick. Before he knew it, Dr. Cunningham had the whole story of what had happened since Joe's last day in school. Joe didn't know it, but he had already heard much of it before, from Roy and Mrs. Manners.

"So you liked your work with the construction company?"

Joe gave an emphatic affirmative.

"Is that the sort of work you would like to do? Have you ever thought about the kind of work you're going to choose for your life-work?"

Choose? Did people *choose* their work? Joe had never thought of that.

"I—never—thought. I just thought I'd get some work, when I wanted it, and just keep on. A

boy I know got a job right away as a messenger-boy."

"Don't think of that," said Dr. Cunningham, abruptly. "Do you know why not?" he demanded, seeing the surprise in Joe's face.

"No, sir," answered Joe. He glanced at the clock. Here was Dr. Cunningham wasting all this time on him!

"It's what we call a 'blind-alley occupation.' Did you ever hear of that? There's no way out to bigger things through doing that. You couldn't be a messenger-boy very long, you know. And you're not in any way a bit better fitted to do something else, or earn more money, when you get through. Now, take an apprentice to a plumber, for example; while he's working, and earning, at the same time he's *learning*—learning things that will make him able to set up for himself later. Do you see the difference?"

"Yes, sir," Joe was really interested. What a lot of things there were to figure out in the world.

"And then, if you once get into the right kind of an occupation, the only limit as to how far you go is yourself. And by yourself I mean everything—your character, your mind, your education, your ambition in the matter. For example, your friend, Red Mike." Joe was thinking about him, himself. "You say he can't read. Yet he advises *you* to go back to school. Why? Don't you suppose it's because he feels keenly how the lack of

an education is keeping him back. For he must have a splendid mind to do the things he does."

"It's just like a horse tied to a post," said Joe. "He can get so far, and then can't go any farther."

The principal laughed. "So we'll have to be careful that we give ourselves as long a halter as possible, and tie ourselves to the right kind of a post at the start. Are you going to stay till you graduate?" he asked abruptly.

"I dunno what my father's plannin'. I know he was goin' to keep me in school this year. He may need me. I don't like to loaf in school when—" Joe stopped confused. That unfortunate phrase had slid out before he thought. But Principal Cunningham only laughed.

"You mean, staying in school without earning? For I didn't know you *were* loafing in school, now. If you boys and girls would only realize that you are working—working for your parents when you work in school. It doesn't show at once, but it does later on. You believe that, don't you, Joe?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"You liked this work with the construction company. Just why?"

"I dunno. I liked bein' with lots o' men, an' doin' things—makin' big things," Joe was trying to explain the unexplainable.

"Why not plan definitely for some of the building trades? Go and talk with this Mike. Talk with your father. Think it over. You've got till

June anyway. And come and talk with me. You're interested in Scouting, Roy says." (Did Dr. Cunningham know everything?) "When you get to be a first-class Scout, there are merit badges that often tell you whether you do, or whether you don't, want to choose a particular occupation. You can get them in Architecture, Automobiling, Electricity, Machinery, Masonry, Blacksmithing, Mining, Plumbing—look them up; there are many more. You know where to find them—in the *Handbook*? Or haven't you seen it?"

"Roy loaned it to me." Joe hadn't meant to begin talking about Roy.

"And what about Roy? Are you going back as his guide?"

"Dunno," muttered Joe.

"He needs you. He told me he never had such a good guide before. That money would help, wouldn't it, in keeping you in school longer? Are you feeling shy towards his mother, because of Dick? Or are you a bit of a coward about facing your own mistakes?"

Joe didn't answer. How *did* Dr. Cunningham manage to strike things so exactly?

"And Roy believed in you through it all. Isn't that a reason for not deserting him now?"

Joe looked down. That word *desert* again!

"Shall I send for him?" asked Dr. Cunningham, with a smile. His hand hung over the bell which would summon his secretary.

"I—guess so," jerked out Joe. He was surprised at the feeling of relief that the clang of the bell brought.

"Has Roy Manners—the blind boy—come yet?" the principal asked the secretary.

"I'll send to his room to see, Dr. Cunningham," she replied.

"Have him come here, please." Then to Joe, "I'm glad, for his sake, you decided to do it. He has missed you sadly."

A few minutes later Roy stood at the door.

"Roy," said Dr. Cunningham, "here's your old guide back again."

Roy's white face lighted. "Not—*Joe!*" he cried, incredulously.

"No one but Joe. Now you two boys go to your room and begin to make up the time you have lost."

Joe slipped his hand through Roy's elbow. The grip Roy gave him was good to feel. But neither said a word, and both were glad that the bell for assembly rang at that identical moment.

"I've been studying in the Library, here at school," said Roy, at the close of school. "Would you rather keep on that way? And Bob Norris can go home with me."

Joe felt ashamed. How good it was of Roy to appreciate Joe's feeling of hating to go back to the Manners' house. Another bugbear in his path keeled over. And Roy, for his part, knew from

the way Joe assented that he had guessed right about it.

But Roy—whose affliction made him sensitive to the feelings of others—was nevertheless resolved to get his pal Joe back again, and maneuvered to bring it about. One day it became necessary to ask Joe to take him home, for Bob Norris didn't appear.

"You needn't go in, or see any one, if you don't want to," apologized Roy, so humbly that Joe again felt ashamed of himself for being "touchy."

"See here; you needn't worry about that," he said, gruffly.

"Do you mean you wouldn't mind?" asked Roy, eagerly.

"Do you mean you'd *rather* have me study with you there than here?" demanded Joe.

"Why, ye-es; in lots of ways. My books and things are handy there—there's a rest between to go home and have luncheon. Don't you s'pose you can?"

"All you have to do is to say the word," answered Joe, firmly. Surely a fellow might do something hard for the best pal that ever was!

"Then—would you mind—we'll begin to-morrow."

"O. K.," answered Joe, cheerfully.

Joe's chief concern now was his meeting with Mrs. Manners. But he found he needn't have worried. For a week he went in and out of the house

without seeing a soul—not even Norah. Then one day Roy's mother walked into the room and began speaking to him as if nothing had ever happened.

"Joe," said she, "will you do an errand for me when you go to-night?"

"Yes'm," stammered Joe, embarrassed.

"Will you deliver—this? The address is on it." She laid on the table a small box about an inch square; and then went hastily away, without another word, before Joe had time to pick it up.

Joe took it up with some curiosity. Her manner was so peculiar and hurried, with almost embarrassment in it, that Joe was puzzled. He was not accustomed to seeing Mrs. Manners embarrassed. On the small white packet was written the direction—

Miss Cicely Darby

Something for Sis—from *her*! Joe put it down again on the table. He couldn't forget that at the end she had been convinced of his guilt. She had caused *him* so much anguish, once—she wasn't going to begin being nice to Sis, and then letting her drop just when she felt like it.

But Joe's eyes fell on Roy's sensitive face, as he listened. It had been aglow—now the glow was fading into troubled doubt as he waited, questioningly.

"You're not going to act obstinate and stupid

about it, are you?" Roy asked at last. "It's from me as well as mother—"

"All right, you chump. It's gone into my pocket already," interrupted Joe. He was never so glad of anything as that the clock began to strike five at that instant.

"Got to go," he muttered; and fled.

Joe looked at that package many times on the way home. Of course he couldn't open it; but he could wonder about it, and feel of it, and even shake it. But all that told him nothing.

"Now *I've* got a secret to tease *you* with," began Joe, as he dropped into the chair by Sis's bedside.

"Have you? How nice. Tell me right away."

"Wouldn't be a secret, then, would it?" laughed Joe. "If that isn't just like a girl!"

But Sis only turned over, shut her eyes as if to listen, and rested a hand on Joe's.

This was Joe's chance he had been hoping for. He already had the box ready in his hand. Now he pulled his hand from under hers, leaving the box there instead.

Sis opened her eyes in hurt surprise at his jerking his hand away. Then she felt the strange object.

"Why—what—?" she began.

"Search me. *I* don't know what it is," replied Joe, honestly. How he enjoyed her puzzled face!



“Oh, Joe!” she cried. “A *diamond—ring!*”

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Now she turned the box over and around till she found the address.

"Why—that's me!" she cried.

"Correct," grinned Joe. "Glad you know your own name, Sis."

"Where'd you get it? Who's it from?" she demanded.

"Roy and—his mother."

"Well; I'm going to open it," she said at last, after feeling it all over again.

"I should hope so!" complained Joe. But he was enjoying himself hugely.

She untied the hard knot with trembling fingers. The tissue paper disclosed inside a velvet jewel-box. Sis paused before she pressed the spring that opened it.

"What *do* you s'pose is in it?" she murmured. She touched the spring. "Oo-o-o!" she shrieked.

The daintiest diamond ring lay winking on its white velvet inside the box.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried. "A *diamond—ring!* What do you s'pose it means?"

"There's a letter—dropped out when you undid it," suggested Joe, picking it up from the floor. He was sorry now that he had taken it.

Sis read aloud:

"My dear Miss Darby." ("Miss Darby," repeated Sis.)
"We—Roy and his mother—are sending this to you so that through you we may tell your brother Joe what we feel he will not let us tell him—that we know, and understand, and are

grateful for, the services that he rendered us one night not long ago. Whenever you look at it, or he does, you are to think that we remember how he saved certain other diamond rings, and unfortunately suffered for it. We are sorry for that; we are sorry that we perhaps helped add to his burden—'

"Oh, Joe, isn't she sweet? And isn't *it* grand! Don't you see what she means—what she's trying to say? She knows all about it—she understands—and she's *sorry* she didn't believe in you, and that she made you feel bad—"

"She needn't make a fuss over *me*," responded Joe. But somehow he felt as if a great, ugly burden had been quietly lifted.

"I tell you, Joe, they must think a lot of you." She looked at him with worshiping eyes.

"Oh, pshaw!" answered Joe.

So Joe slipped back rather more easily than he had expected, into his old position. Things began to go on in the same way they had before the robbery. Yet not quite: Joe saw—because now he was on the lookout for them—new possibilities in school; since Red Mike had spoken as he had about it, and since Dr. Cunningham had added to that. Joe never lost the feeling, either, that he had suddenly jumped over two or three years of life—the feeling that he was older by that much actual time, and that the old Joe of two or three months ago was really as far away as two or three years. But best of all was the new understanding between Joe and his father. Joe never stopped to

listen now, to see if Mr. Darby were in a good humor before he ventured inside the door; he didn't start whenever he heard that gruff voice call his name. Nor his heart didn't beat fast—except with pride—the next time he brought home his report card to be signed.

"H'm," said Mr. Darby. "I've seen them things before." He and Joe exchanged a twinkling glance of appreciation of past experiences. Then Mr. Darby looked back at the card.

"Le's see—ye'll be sixteen in July," he said.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, wondering what was coming.

"I'm thinkin' ye can stay in school another year, mebbe, if ye want to."

Joe's heart leaped. "I'd like to work vacation time, and Saturdays," he suggested.

"Ye see, your dollar a week makes Sis's trip sure next summer," said Mr. Darby, as he signed the card.

"Does it?" cried Joe. He hadn't been sure of that.

"So I don't have to save f'r that." Mr. Darby put his pipe back into his mouth.

"Say," demanded Joe. "Can't I tell her? I know she'd like to be sure."

"Well—are *you* sure o' keepin' y'r job with Roy?"

"Yes, sir." How proud Joe felt.

"Tell her if you think it'll make her easier. I

had a notion it might make her unaisy for summer to come if she was sure. An' it's so long till summer."

"Oh, I'm sure it won't," answered Joe. "She's worryin' all the time now about whether there'll be enough to take her."

"Well; you know her better nor any of us—even her ma. She's a quare little girl. I'm countin' on you t' keep clost to her, an' be good to her. She'll tell you things she won't tell any one else."

Joe felt six inches taller as he went in to tell Sis the glad news. He was Sis's guardian, appointed by his father. He felt as if he had been knighted. *He* knew she'd been adding up that money till the doubt made her nearly crazy.

"I guess you're a good Scout, all right," she murmured, after he had told her, with a happy smile on the face, which she tried in vain to sober down.

Joe wasn't fishing for any compliments, and he told Sis so. "That reminds me," he exclaimed, glad to change the subject, "I'd better return Roy's *Handbook*."

"I was just goin' to ask if you were through with it," said Roy, in answer to that question, the next day. "I'm going to pass my first class requirements next month," he said proudly.

Joe felt a jab of jealousy. He knew—for he knew those requirements by heart—that the first-

class tests required Roy to "enlist a Tenderfoot trained by himself." Who was Roy's Tenderfoot going to be? For a week Joe wondered about it. Once he had thought perhaps—no, he had no business thinking things! Roy had a right to choose his own Tenderfoot, of course.

But Roy never mentioned Scouts again; and Joe noticed that he changed the subject, one day when Joe happened to speak of them, in a most embarrassed way.

“Do you remember your Braille?” asked Roy one day in study-hall.

"Guess so," answered Joe. He hadn't happened to need to transcribe anything for Roy since he started in being his guide anew. Roy had a new typewriter, and wrote his exercises on it.

"See if you can read this," he said, with a queer smile crinkling the corners of his mouth. He punched a sentence with unusually awkward fingers, and Joe looked over his shoulder and read as he punched:



“Will you be my Tenderfoot—”

Joe reached and took the stylus and tablet, before Roy had a chance to write the question-mark. He wrote:



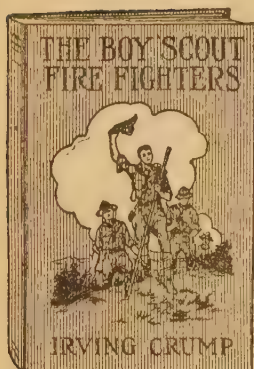
And when Roy's eager fingers read Joe's "You bet," both felt as if there was nothing more left in the world to be desired.

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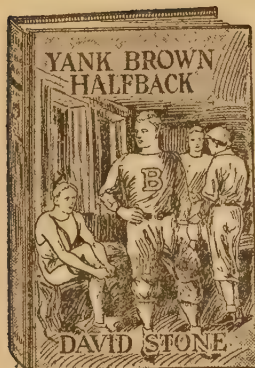
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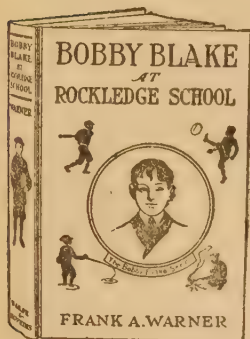
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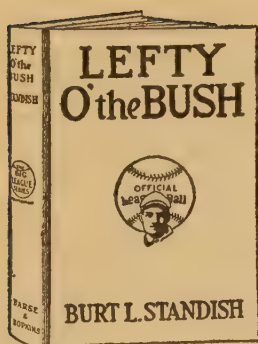
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